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TODD
M[illegible]FARLANE'S
C[illegible]NSORED SPIDEY [illegible] SCENE

#85

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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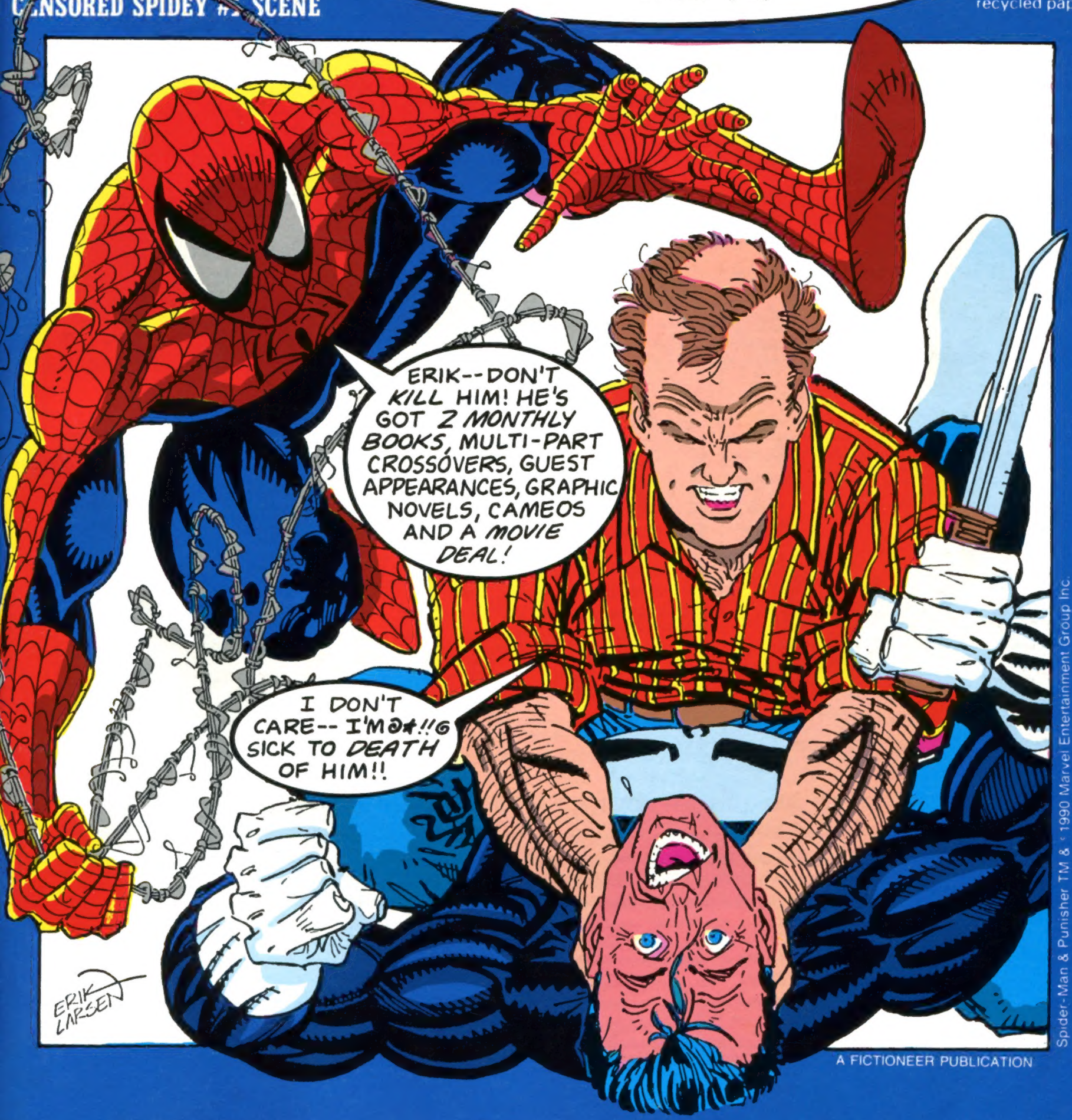
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GREG ACCIDENTALLY WOUNDED HIM OUT OF SEASON, SO WE'RE PUTTING HIM UP TILL HE GETS BACK ON HIS FEET TO AVOID LITIGATION...
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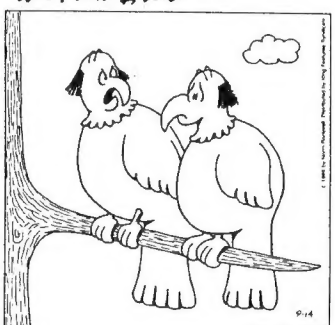
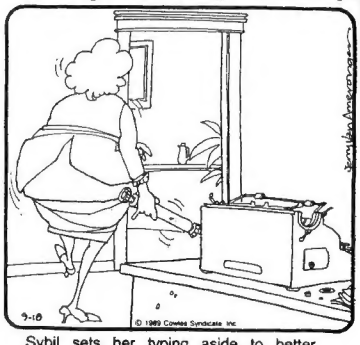


"It's genetic! We're SUPPOSED to be bald!"

the neighborhood Jerry Van Amerongen



Sybil sets her typing aside to better respond to her boss's latest crisis.

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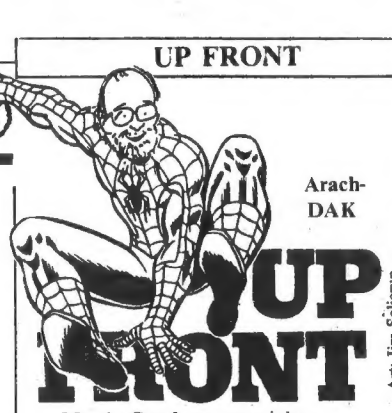

Art: Jim Salicrup

Martin Goodman was right.

As Marvel's publisher, he reportedly told then-editor/writer **Stan Lee** that people would have a negative reaction to a comic character called Spider-Man, since spiders are so hated by many (witness this summer's fear film, ARACHNOPHOBIA) — and, at least in my case, he was right.

I gave the book a wide berth, not even sampling THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN until issue #19, and not really accepting it as truly here to stay until issue #33 (for some reason, I can distinctly remember officially "recognizing" it as of that issue — after all, even back then I knew that many comics came and went, and odds were the ones that reached high issue numbers were "real"). If it had been up to me, I guess that Spider-Man would have quietly faded away.

But many *more* people apparently liked Spidey than I disliked this new "*on*-the-wall" character — and so a comics star was born and the Marvel Age of Comics found firm (webbed) footing. Years later, even I came around, and ended up producing the SPIDER-MAN 1978 CALENDAR for Simon & Schuster, aided and abetted by **Jim Salicrup.**

These days, Jim is the "arachnerd" in charge of editing all the Spider-Man comics at Marvel. His newest SPIDER-MAN series, written and drawn by **Todd McFarlane,** has just broken all sales records and made comics history (we talked to Todd in INTERVIEW #81, which no doubt gave the book just the boost it needed to blast off!).

Anyway, Jim introduced me to **McFarlane** (hi, Todd!) at a recent Atlanta comics convention, after which **Salicrup** came for a stay at our secret hideout on Screamer Mountain (since the mountain wouldn't come to Manhattan). It was good to see him again — for those who haven't read the masthead lately, Jim's our consulting editor — and to hear that Spidey's back on top, where **Salicrup** believes he belongs.

According to Jim, lots of people want to like Spider-Man and have just been waiting for a good excuse, despite any lurking ancestral hate or fear of arachnids.

Looks like he and Stan are right, too!

-Dave B

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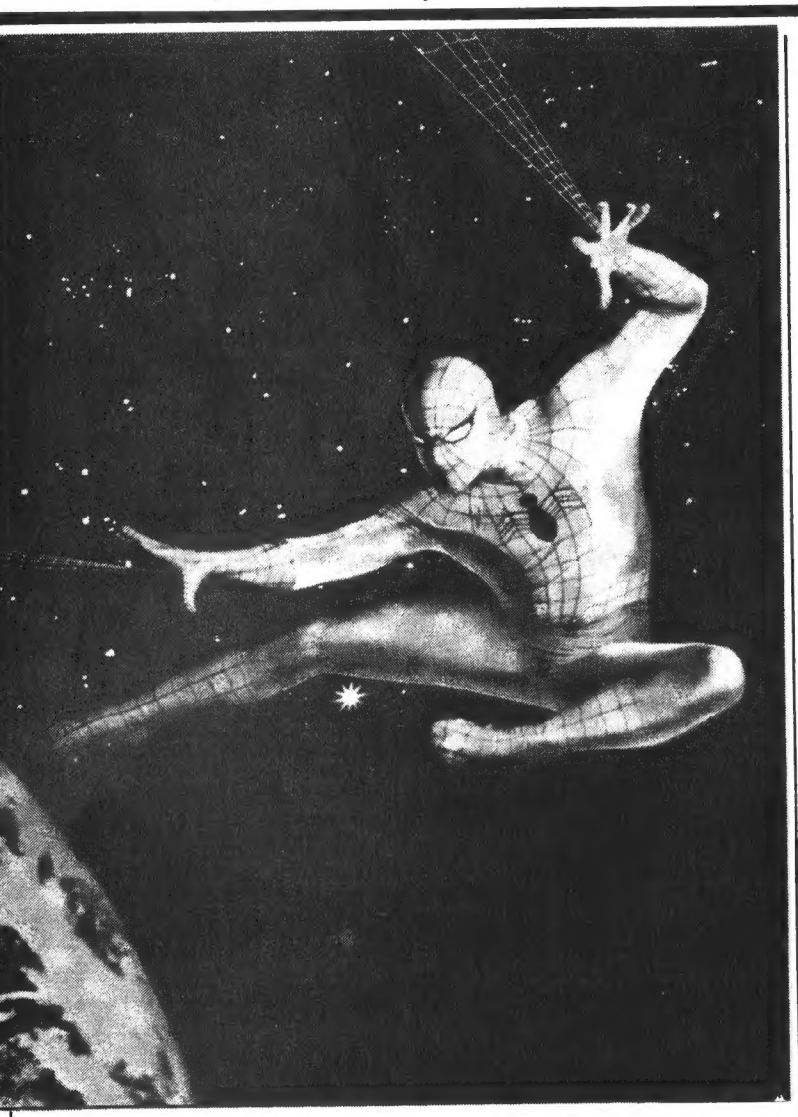
"Stan Lee said, 'What would you like to



Poster art by unknown artist for the unreleased Cannon film.

Ever wonder why certain comic-book properties keep having film or TV adaptations announced, yet you never see the finished product? How about when a film version of a popular character bears no resemblance to the comics? Did you know that SUPERMAN IV is part of the reason there hasn't been a SPIDER-MAN movie yet? Did you know this introduction is starting to sound like an Andy Rooney monologue? Anyway, Ted Newsom knows the answers to most of those questions: As co-writer of one of the unproduced SPIDER-MAN scripts, as well as screenplays for yet-to-be-seen versions of SGT. FURY AND SUBMARINER, he told Patrick Daniel O'Neill all about the internal workings of those projects and Hollywood in general . . .

PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL: *Let's start with something real simple — well, it's a simple question, it may not have a simple answer. How did you get involved in a project to write a SPIDER-MAN script?*

TED NEWSOM: My partner, **John Brancato,** and I had been introduced to **Stan Lee** by our agent, and on the basis of that we did a script for Stan called SGT. FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS, which was a contemporary Nick Fury story — not NICK FURY, AGENT OF SHIELD, but war stuff. Finished with that, I asked Stan, "Gee, what else can we do for you? How about Spider-Man?"

He said, "Well, we can't really do that. Cannon's got that. I don't have any pull with them. I think they've got a writer on it. What else would you like to do?

And I said, "How about Spider-Man?"

TED NEWSOM

Spider-Man, Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos, Dr. Octopus, Aunt May and Sub-Mariner ©1990 MEG Inc. / Spider-Man (the movie) ©1985 Cannon Films and (TV show) ©1978 CBS / UNDER FIRE ©1979 Orion Pic-

do?' And I said, 'How about Spider-Man?'"

1985 20 Century Fox Film Corp. / MONA LISA ©1986 Island Pictures / ATTACK OF THE B-MOVIE MONSTERS ©1985 Heidelberg Films Inc. / A SOLDIER'S STORY © 1984 Columbia Pictures Ind., Inc.

So it went. Ultimately, he got us in there. We spoke to a couple of story editors, producers; once was all it took. They read the scripts that we had done on SGT. FURY and on the basis of that we did the story for the SPIDER-MAN film, basically from Stan's outline, and then met with the director, **Joe Zito,** who was the director at the time. He was not assigned to it when we were; **Tobe Hooper** was originally supposed to direct it then. That's how that started.

PAT: *Now, let's go back a little bit. From the fact that you could look at Stan and say, "How about Spider-Man?" and when you said Sgt. Fury you clarified it by saying, "Not Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD . . ."*

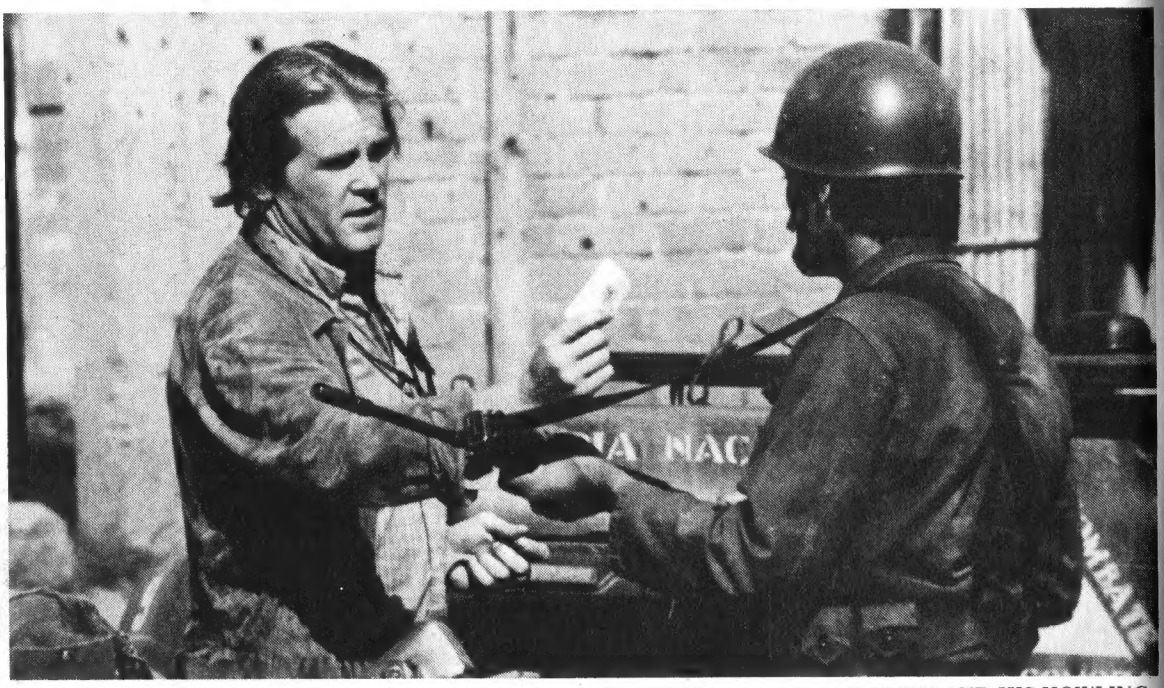
TED: That sucks — who believes a gigantic metal zeppelin floating around in the clouds?

PAT: *Of course, when it's much easier to believe in high-school students who have been bitten by radioactive spiders . . .*

TED: There's a certain sense of believability here.

I was kind of a fan of SGT. FURY, because it was fun interplay and I always thought, as a kid, 20 years ago, the Agent of SHIELD thing smacked of trying to

"If you asked me what Spider-Man's doing



Above: photo from UNDER FIRE. Nick Nolte was who we had in mind when we wrote SGT. FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS. Below: Art by Kirby and Ayers.

SGT. FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS IN...
"7 DOOMED MEN!"
HERE'S THE BRIEF ON WHAT'S HAPPENED SO FAR, POW-PALS! FURY AND THE BATTLE-BOYS HAVE BEEN ORDERED TO DESTROY A HEAVY-WATER INSTALLATION IN THE GERMAN TOWN OF HEINEMUND. BUT THE MISSION SNARLS UP AND THE HOWLING COMMANDOS ARE CAPTURED...
BRIEFING'S OVER! SO SADDLE-UP!... AND LET'S GO!

cash in on the James Bond craze ten years after the fact. This was about '68 or '70, I guess, and it just seemed silly to have all these guys running around being secret agents when where they should have been was fighting bad guys as soldiers — or at least mercenaries.

Where was I going with that?

PAT: *I was going to say that you're obviously a comic-book fan . . .*

TED: Yeah . . . or was. I'm not particularly up to date on a lot of stuff. If you asked me what Spider-Man was doing in the comic books I really couldn't tell you; I'd have to research that. I know some of the stuff — off the wall stuff, like **Mark Verheiden's** stuff, which I follow because he's an old friend of mine.

But new characters in the X-MEN — I haven't a clue. *(Laughter.)*

PAT: *That's all right; there's a famous story that Stan didn't either.*

Let's follow your path, then. You were a comics fan in the mid to late '60s and into the '70s . . .

TED: Certainly, from the '50s. I was born in '52 . . .

PAT: *Ah, we're the same age!*

TED: You're probably a bit older, I'd guess, unless you were born after the

in the comic books I really couldn't tell you."

third of December that year.

So I read all the classic DC stuff, horror comics and then into the '60s when the Marvel stuff started cropping up. I even read the awful off-the-wall stuff, like THE FLY. I get a kick out of that. I get a kick out of the most bizarre things. I always liked Martian Manhunter — he's the janitor of the superhero set. What is he good for — he got this four-page story at the back of the book, somewhere; he doesn't have any clothes on and if you flick a match he falls apart! *(Laughter.)*

You got the Justice League all battling evil and the Martian Manhunter has to stay back in the headquarters and sweep up!

I always got a kick out of odd things like that. FLY MAN — that's what it was! And Fly Girl — why not? Fly Girl, Fly Dog, Fly Fly! Actually, Man Fly would be good — I should propose that to Dark Horse or something: an entire fly universe and this one fly turns into a man and goes around swatting evil. Not a bad idea, but I don't think you could push it to more than three or four issues, though.

So, yeah, I followed comic books, but also fantasy, horror and science-fiction films. That's where I'm gonna be spending the next ten or 15 or 20 years.

PAT: *What was your background or training to get into film writing?*

TED: Like almost everybody, I made films as a kid. I went to Portland State University and studied filmmaking — if you can call it studying. Basically, what we did is make movies. Eventually, I ended up in Los Angeles, where I wrote and continued to make movies or try to. I did a lot of magazine work for national-type stuff — men's magazines, often: PLAYBOY, OUI, that sort of stuff.

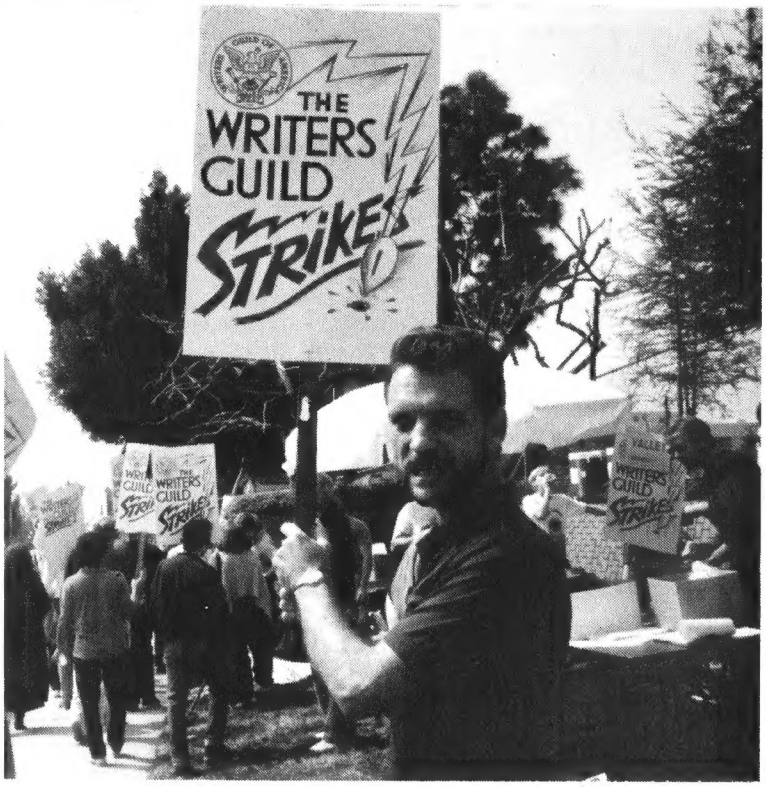
But my love has always been to write movies, to make movies, and I always knew that the only way I was going to do that was to write them and get in that particular door.

SPIDER-MAN was certainly a turning point, because it was my first Writers Guild picture; both John and I got into the Guild on that, which was just wonderful. We actually thought for awhile it was gonna get made — of course, that was five years ago. Now, I don't know — we move on.

PAT: *(long pause)*

I'm just putting my thoughts together.

TED: Line from CITIZEN KANE: *(crotchety voice)* "C'mon, c'mon, young man, we asked questions a lot faster when I was working." *(Laughter.)*



The next natural action of a screenwriter.

I'll just fill in the blank: I did a lot of interviews with people that I was a fan of when I was a kid. The second piece I ever got paid for was an interview with **Kenneth Tobey,** who was the star of WHIRLYBIRDS and THE THING. He's still a friend and a wonderful guy. Through that, because I was writing for magazines at the time, I got to meet all kinds of neat actors and directors. I got to meet **Eugene Lourie,** who did GORGO and BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS. I did a long retrospective on **Ray Harryhausen** for CINEFANTASTIQUE, which **Fred Clark** assures me is going to run part two sometime between now and 2001.

PAT: (Laughter.) *I do a lot of writing for their major competitor, STARLOG.*

TED: That's one market I never cracked, although we got a mention in it. I did a reunion of the cast and crew of THE THING and STARLOG had a mention.

PAT: *Can you give me a bit of a rundown, without giving away too much, of the story of the SPIDER-MAN script?*

TED: That varies with whatever draft you're talking about . . .

PAT: *Start with the first draft and work your way through.*

TED: I can give you what we did and I can also give you at least some insight to one of the previous incarnations and one of the following ones.

Stan had come up with a basic story —Spidey vs. Doc Ock. The elements

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Ted Newsom
Born: 3 December 1952
Education: Portland State University, Oregon
Profession: Screenwriter
Credits: Unproduced screenplays for SPIDER-MAN, SGT. FURY and SUB-MARINER; DECATHLON, METAMORPH, MONSTERS AND MANIACS, ATTACK OF THE B-MOVIE MONSTER
Attitude Toward Adaptations of Comics: "I think when people try to improve on these 'stupid comic-book characters' they merely show a lack of understanding of why the thing's a success and an insecurity about where they are themselves."

"Because this was the first Spider-Man movie you

Here and next page: Storyboards from the never-filmed SPIDER-MAN movie. Boards by our very own Paul Power.

were Spidey and Doc Ock and anti-gravity. That's fairly loose; it was like a page, a couple of pages. Those were the elements we incorporated. Within that, we had to — because this was the first Spider-Man movie and you can't assume that everyone in the audience knows exactly what's going on — not only create Spider-Man, but create Dr. Octopus as well. Those are two fairly heavy-duty changes for your major characters.

We consolidated those so that it is one accident that causes both — not exactly at the same time, but John and I thought two atomic accidents within the space of 90 minutes was probably stretching reality. *(Laughter.)*

Let me back up a little bit: Stan's story, if I recollect, is Spider-Man created, Doc Ock created; Doc Ock goes crazy, decides to become a master criminal and with an anti-gravity ray holds New York for ransom. I'm simplifying, but those are the basic moments he was providing us with.

We modified that to simplify it to one accident causing both — thus Spidey and Doc Ock are opposite sides of the same atomic coin and updated it to wherever we were at the time — I think 1985. So there were contemporary references, but we basically used as a template the original story of Spider-Man in AMAZING FANTASY #15.

We veered from anti-gravity into an idea that I give **John Brancato** full credit for — because he's far more hip on these things than I am. We made Doc Ock a researcher into sub-atomic particles who is trying to discover and find proof of the "fifth force" — which would be a great title for a movie by itself, wouldn't it?

The fifth force is a probably real, but at this point hypothetical, force that in fact holds together all four of the existing forces in the universe —

PAT: *The unified field theory . . .*

TED: Exactly. Our Doc Ock takes **Einstein** beyond that and shows proof of the unified field. Unfortunately, the reverse of that is that he causes these terrible electromagnetic problems. Doc Ock has, by this time, gone crazy, because he's absorbed these waldoes into his system and does not care about anything except completing and proving his theory. So, things in New York are becoming ridiculously magnetized, buses and cars are being jerked across the street, a subway train crashing up through the street and jamming itself into a building and — ultimately, when everything goes crazy in the finale — an entire school building ripped from its roots and flying miles and miles into the air, presumably into infinity. Of course, Spider-Man stops the whole thing and it comes crashing to Earth — and if you think Spider-Man dies in that, you haven't thought there was going to be a sequel.

That's what we came up with on the basis of Stan's outline; that was our treatment. Cannon went for it.

We suggested to Stan, at the time we did the treatment, "Let's kill off Aunt May" — and he was appalled. He had evidently been out of the country when Gwen Stacy was killed and was extremely irate when he returned and found out she was dead. I was appalled when she died: I thought, "My god, Peter's life is over." Of course, it wasn't, he went on, got married to Mary Jane — poor fool.

I've always thought Aunt May was a pain; I never had any use for this old bat at all and John felt the same way. We couldn't — so instead we made her what we felt was a fun character. Rather than a little old lady in lace and crinoline, we made her hip, in a way that Peter never was. We were thinking of someone like **Katharine Hepburn** or **Lauren Bacall** — who would be 65 or 70 years old but would run rings around this poor nerd. Stan wasn't terribly happy about it, but then he created Aunt May and has lived with her for 25 years, so he's very proprietary about her. Justly so — it's a good character; I just wouldn't want her for my Aunt May.

We dropped the idea that Doc Ock is a criminal. He's a criminal only in the sense that he used criminal means to attain certain things; we kept him single-minded. Basically, we patterned him on **Edward Teller** — because **Teller** presumably doesn't give a shit: "You want us to make an H-bomb? OK, we make an H-bomb — that's nice! OK — we'll make a satellite that'll blow up everything!" He doesn't pay any attention to what the ramifications are. And that's basically

can't assume the audience knows what's going on."

where Otto Octavius was; rather than becoming a master criminal because he was crazy and had four waldoes in his chest.

Peter was a nerd. Who did we use as the girl? I forget the name we used, but it was from the comic . . .

PAT: *Let's see: Your choices are Betty Brant, Liz Allen, Gwen Stacy and Mary Jane Watson . . .*

TED: It was Liz Allen. And she's beyond him, of course. She's nuts about Flash Thompson. Our change in Flash was to make him a good-looking yuppie as opposed to a high-school thug.

Let's see, what other changes did we make that would have us catch shit from the fans? We still used J. Jonah Jameson, Robbie a little.

We tried to maintain the integrity of what we remembered as Spider-Man and still not do a period show. We had spidey go on television before he realizes his mission in life — which he does in the comic — but we had him go on **David Letterman.** In the original, I think it's **Ed Sullivan** . . .

PAT: *I don't think it's actually Sullivan, but the reference is decidedly to a Sullivan-type show.*

TED: We had fun with the wrestling bit — I think we specified **Hulk Hogan.** So there were topical references, but still within the framework of the familiar Spider-Man story.

There were a couple of things we tossed in because I liked it. We had a secondary character named Mr. Thorkell, head of the university Peter attends and where Octavius is a professor — Thorkell is a name from the movie DR. CYCLOPS. There was an opposite number to Octavius named Rosimoff, who I always thought **Peter Cushing** would have been absolutely marvelous for — basically the kindly half of science as opposed to the sick intellect of Octavius with his bizarro warped brain.

We had anti-gravity and flying buildings — and of course you have to up the ante a little bit. There's a cyclotron in the building, Spidey and Doc Ock are battling, Liz is there and doesn't know what's going on, and Rosimoff is trying to stop the building from going straight up because that will mean the entire universe will be sucked into this hole, etc., etc. That's raising the ante.

Spider-Man manages to save the day, partially by accident.

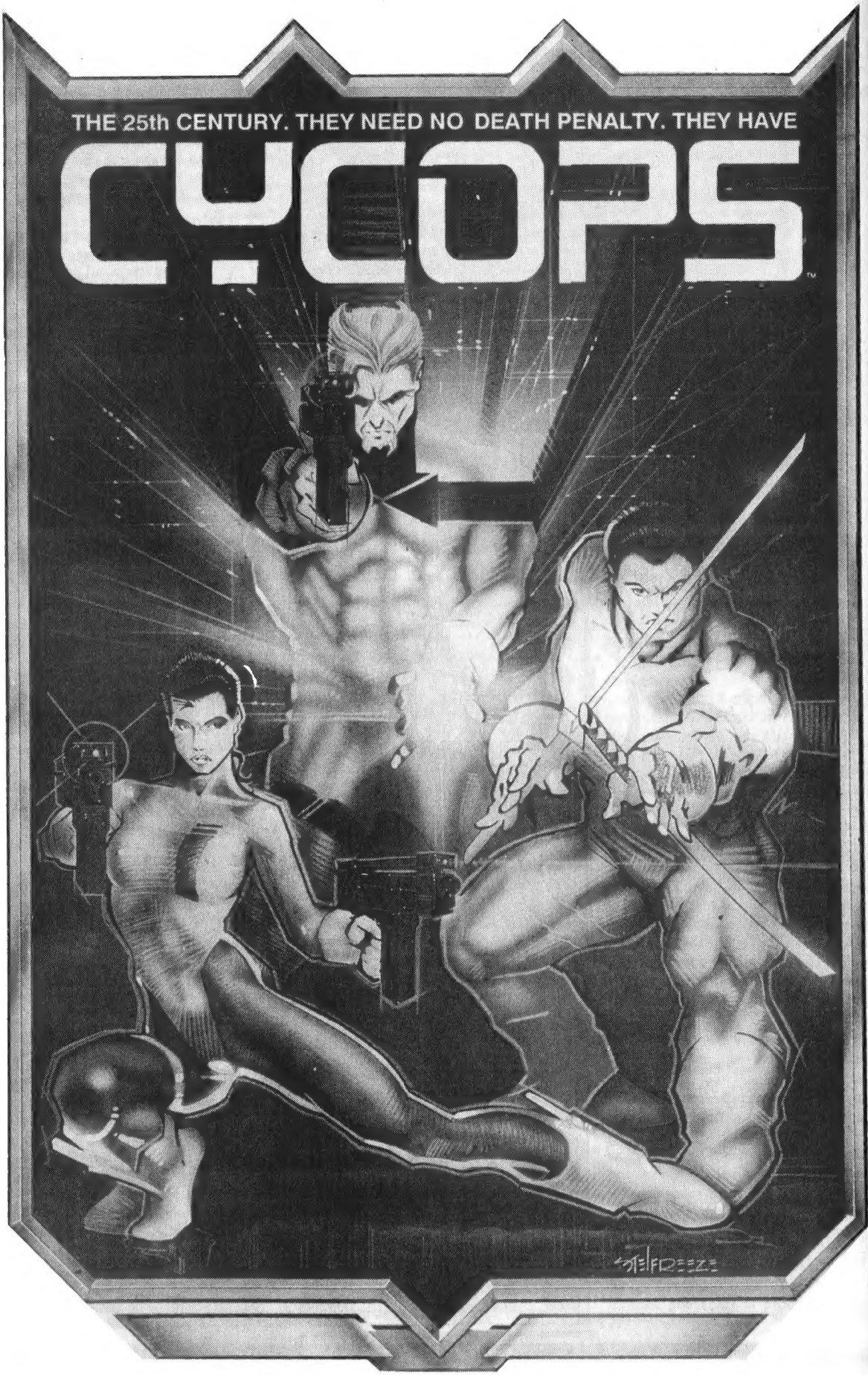
PAT: *So, that was the draft you handed in . . .*

TED: Right. And, subsequent to our being hired, **Joe Zito** was hitting Cannon to do this film. Joe had done a lot of strictly action films . . . a couple of big-budget **Chuck Norris** things like INVASION USA. His attitude toward this was that they were all real films done in a comic-booky way, and he wanted to do the reverse: a comic-book character in a comic-book story in a very realistic way. That sounded good to me.

Cannon had an artist named **Mentor Huebner** to do some absolutely wonderful pre-production sketches in charcoal: the flying buildings, the subway snaking up out of the street. Just wonderful and atmospheric. **Huebner** has done this sort of stuff for **John**

The classic AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #12 (May, 1964) by Lee and Ditko.

TOO WEAK FOR A LONG BATTLE! I'VE GOT TO KNOCK HIM OUT WITH THE FIRST PUNCH! IT'S MY ONLY CHANCE!
OH--NO! I TRIED MY BEST, BUT MY SPIDER STRENGTH IS GONE! IT WAS JUST A WEAK, MEANINGLESS PUNCH --HE HARDLY FELT IT!
WHAT SORT OF STUNT IS THIS, SPIDER-MAN? I KNOW YOU CAN HIT HARDER THAN THAT! IF THIS IS SOME SORT OF TRICK, IT'LL DO YOU NO GOOD -- YOU WON'T BE GIVEN A SECOND CHANCE!


THE 25th CENTURY. THEY NEED NO DEATH PENALTY. THEY HAVE
CYCOPS

"Our script captured the elements of Spider-Man."

Carpenter's version of THE THING, Disney's 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA and the stuff was just gorgeous, Cannon looked like they were going to spend probably between 14 and 20 million dollars on this.

That was first draft, I'm told everybody was happy with it. Stan figured it was about 80 percent right and it needed a rewrite. Joe seemed relatively happy with it and Cannon said it's fine. One of the guys at Marvel wrote a letter to **Menahem Golan** at the time about this and CAPTAIN AMERICA, which were both in development, and praised this. I was delighted to see it, because it said our SPIDER-MAN script, among the 15 or 20 scripts or treatments they had seen, captured the elements of Spider-Man. I think **Jim Galton** wrote the letter. Then he turned around and said, "On the other hand, you got this Captain America thing. This stinks, it's confusing, I don't know what's going on . . ." They never used that particular CAPTAIN AMERICA script.

We were prepared to do the second draft and Joe decided to bring in a friend of his — **Barney Cohen** — to do the rewrite. That was fine; he'd known Barney for years and they had done FRIDAY THE 13TH PART FOUR together — whichever one Joe directed. Barney rewrote it, keeping most of what we had, and adding several more action scenes. I'll defer my opinion of everything after our version until later, out of deference to Barney, who's a nice guy. It wasn't a worse script; I don't feel it was better, but I'm personally involved.

After Barney did a couple of drafts, **Menahem Golan** decided he was going to rewrite everybody.

PAT: (Laughter.) *Oh, dear!*

TED: I admire anybody with an entrepreneurial sense — and he has that, obviously. Anybody who can go broke several times over ten years and still talk people into giving him money to make pictures has a certain panache.

PAT: *There is probably as much talent in being able to do that as there is in being able to write a script.*

TED: More — and certainly more money in it, too.

Menahem was born in Israel and never grew up with Spider-Man. I think that was a major drawback in trying to approach the character, either as a producer overseeing everything or certainly as the gentleman rewriting everybody.

And rewriting is relative: From what I hear, he merely dictated a lot of changes

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in his greatest adventure.
SPIDER-MAN
The Movie
WRITTEN BY TED NEWSOM & JOHN BRANCATO DIRECTED BY JOSEPH ZITO
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Above: Pin-up art by Steve Ditko. Right: Poster printed in the October, 1987 issue of the HOLLYWOOD REPORTER.

"There were all these bizarre changes reflective

Newsom's idea of a hip Aunt May, circa 1990, as played by Katharine Hepburn . . .

and somebody typed them up.

His draft of the script, which was by **Menahem Golan,** based on screenplays by **Barney Cohen, Ted Newsom** and **John Brancato** — it was nice to have our names tossed in there somewhere — had things like a disco scene in which Flash Thompson shows up and, because he looks sideways at Liz, Spider-Man beat the shit out of him. Well, he wouldn't do that! I'm not a purist, we don't have to stick by the letter of what appeared in the comics — it's a different medium and there's a lot of leeway . . .

PAT: *But, given the type of hero Spider-Man is, it doesn't sound like something you'd want him to do.*

TED: No. Number one — I don't think Spider-Man, in costume, has ever evinced any jealousy over anyone. As Peter, certainly — but Peter's passive-aggressive; rather than beat up on somebody he'll go beat himself on the head with a book. *(Laughter.)*

But this has Spider-Man showing up, Flash says, "Hi Liz, what are you doing?" and Spider-Man beats the crap out of him!

So there were all these little bizarre changes that were reflective of somebody who did not know the character. It was that script that circulated for a while.

Unfortunately, several other factors came into play. None of them had anything to do with us as writers. Cannon has all sorts of credit to make pictures and they had a three-picture deal with **Tobe Hooper,** which finished with TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE II — it was INVADERS FROM MARS, TEXAS CHAINSAW, and LIFE-FORCE. By the way, if you ever get the chance to see SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION — do. That's **Tobe Hooper's** latest film. Bless his heart, I wish him no ill, and it would have been interesting to see him do a SPIDER-MAN movie.

A lot of people, I think **Hooper** among

# of somebody who did not know the character."

. . . or Lauren Bacall (Note: Aunt May art by Erik Larsen).

them, have blamed Cannon for distorting his artistic vision and making his films unwatchable, like INVADERS FROM MARS and LIFEFORCE. His film SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION, finished a year ago, he had total rein on it — and it is just absolutely unwatchable. It was made for very little money — I think about $5 or $6 million — and looks much more expensive, but is just absolutely unwatchable. So I don't know that it is entirely Cannon's fault that LIFEFORCE and INVADERS FROM MARS were absolute, utter, worthless pieces of shit. But they were.

The point of that is: They said, "No, we don't want **Tobe Hooper** directing SPIDER-MAN," because he had fulfilled his contract. **Joe Zito** also had some sort of term contract with them, I think to do three films. SPIDER-MAN dragged on for him for several months, they offered him another **Chuck Norris** film, he opted out of that and went on to do RED SCORPION. So another director got in there somewhere — and, at the same time, **Menahem Golan** ran into one of the **Salkinds** in Cannes, and acquired the rights to further sequels of SUPERMAN.

So, we were told — and talk about getting one's hopes up — by Cannon, via our agent, that we should go out and read a whole bunch of WORLD'S FINEST COMICS. And I went, "Wow! I know what we're gonna do!" In about a week, we heard that the two guys who did the sequel to ROMANCING THE STONE . . .

PAT: *JEWEL OF THE NILE?*

TED: Right . . . had gotten the assignment for SUPERMAN IV.

Unfortunately, because of the size of SUPERMAN IV, and because of the cost going out the door — several million dollars to **Christopher Reeve** and half-a-million here, a million there — they could not afford to do two pictures. So

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"They went back to Stan's original idea."

SUPERMAN IV, along with the hugely expensive MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE, helped stall SPIDER-MAN.

they stuck SPIDER-MAN on the back burner . . . and did SUPERMAN IV and MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE instead.

PAT: *They took a bath on both, didn't they?*

TED: I don't know. I don't know how much they spent on SUPERMAN IV — a buck-ninety-eight, I think *(Laughter.)*. Paying a million dollars to this actor and that actor — like you really need **Christopher Reeve** as Superman; you don't really.

According to what I found out from people at Cannon — not secretly, because it wasn't a secret — the production budgets for both films were about the same, projected on the basis of whatever scripts they were working with at the time. But because of the star overhead on SUPERMAN IV, it was a much bigger film. It was also a better bet for them, because they had looked at the other three and said, "Yeah, these all made money, we can do it." Well, it wasn't true — they had made a little bit of money, but they had spent an awful lot.

Shortly thereafter, Cannon went belly-up for various reasons, largely because of overspending on a lot of movies and not making enough money off others. That's been the story for a lot of companies.

PAT: *To your knowledge, who has the rights to the SPIDER-MAN movie now?*

TED: That was in negotiation for quite some time. **Menaham Golan** and **Yoram Globus** parted company. They're cousins, I believe, but there's a touch of animosity there. **Golan** wanted to do SPIDER-MAN — remind me to tell you about the **Leslie Stevens** thing. He wanted to do it with his new company, 21st Century, and Cannon wanted to do it — they were bought out by a company called Pathe. Eventually it ended up with Menahem at 21st Century.

There were a lot of people who would have liked to do it — New World wanted to get it back, when they were in a financial position to make movies.

PAT: *And when they owned Marvel.*

TED: Well, there's one of the reasons they bought Marvel —

PAT: — *for the film properties.*

TED: And what they bought was like the "Leftover X-Men" and the "Fantastic Two and a Half," because all the other characters had been optioned: Torch was over here, Spider-Man was over there.

So, Spidey ended up with **Menahem Golan,** who kept announcing it. Somebody along the way wrote another script, **Frank deFilitta,** who had done several very good, very stylish horror films was to write and direct at one point — I believe he wrote a script and they went for it for awhile. Too bad, because he's a good director.

Then, they went back to Stan's original idea — about a year ago, they were again doing flying buildings, so somebody had a script with those elements in it. Then they left it fallow for awhile. Most recently, late last year, they decided to try again and Stan recommended a good writer I know, **Neal Ruttenberg,** who went back to Stan's basic idea and wrote another script — Spider-Man, Dr. Octopus and flying buildings.

That's where it stands now: The current projected slate for 21st Century does not seem to have SPIDER-MAN on it. My guess is that they're not willing to go ahead with it. They've done CAPTAIN AMERICA; I've not seen it, I heard it was about 140 minutes long and they were trying to cut it to some sort of manageable length, which unfortunately is exactly what they did with SUPERMAN IV. They had a film that was far too long and in just cutting it down to size, they managed to lose a good deal of continuity. You've got people showing up in that film and then disappearing for no earthly reason — except you paid them a

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"You can't make Spider-Man a pipe-fitter from Detroit."

half-million dollars to show up and you have to have them on screen somewhere.

PAT: *I got the clue that CAPTAIN AMERICA was in trouble when they knocked its release date back again.*

TED: The stills looked very good. At least, they're true to the character. They had a director attached to that named **Michael Winner,** who had done a lot of films for them — all action pictures, mostly with **Charles Bronson.** He's an Englishman and, it appears from his work, extremely cynical and rather anti-Yankee.

PAT: *Strange choice for a CAPTAIN AMERICA movie.*

TED: Yeah. That's not who ultimately directed it. The director is **Albert Pyun,** who, in fact, was attached to SPIDER-MAN for ages and ages. There's this odd, revolving cast of characters.

Other coincidences: After SPIDER-MAN, John and I did a script for Stan for Marvel as a live-action show called DECATHLON, a science-fiction idea, which I discovered recently had been rewritten by **Neal Ruttenberg,** after New World acquired Marvel. That's how I got to know Neal — I called and said, "Hey, you did a good job!"

PAT: *In looking over the stuff that's been done in adapting comics to film and television, what would you say is the best job?*

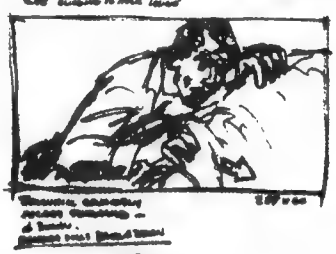
TED: SUPERMAN comes to mind; there are a lot of things about that that I think are very nice; BATMAN, obviously — the most recent one. The PHANTOM serial in the '40s is pretty good. And further back, even FLASH GORDON captures, for its time, the feel of the original strip.

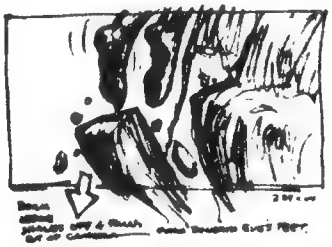
It varies — most obviously recently the big-budget shows. Why they work — I don't know. I don't have a clue, unless they're actually trying to recapture some of what captured the imagination originally in whatever medium it came from. You can't make Spider-Man secretly a pipe-fitter from Detroit. *(Laughter.)* It changes whole aspects of what's going on. You can try, but it wouldn't work very well

Whatever has worked, those are the elements to use. It sounds so silly — but they captured in BATMAN, for example, the Dark Knight element, and extremely well; it was exactly what to do. The SUPERMAN picture, originally, had at least the **Richard Donner** stuff, captures the innocence and purity of the character . . . and some of the sadness, occasionally, which I think was really nice. I think when people try to improve on these

Spider-Man leaps to the rescue in a special new episode of SPIDER-MAN — 8/25/78.

"You can get a cheap laugh over Superman beating





Rare storyboard material by Mentor Huebner for Alfred Hitchcock's closing Mount Rushmore scene (NORTH BY NORTHWEST). Mr. Huebner acted not as storyboard artist, but as production illustrator for Cannon's aborted SPIDER-MAN: THE MOVIE effort. Robert Boyle was the art director.

"stupid comic-book characters" they merely show a lack of understanding of why the thing's a success and an insecurity about where they are themselves.

Point in fact: The **Richard Lester** material in SUPERMAN II and III, which is extremely facile and cynical about the character and Superman — they make him a buffoon. The things that don't work for me are when you start joking things up and just going for a gag. You can get a cheap laugh over Superman beating up a bully, because "Ha ha ha, it's the Man of Steel; the guy punches him in the jaw and breaks his hand." But it's an extremely cheap cheat; Yeah, nobody can beat up Superman . . .

PAT: *You're talking about the scene at the end of SUPERMAN II. I've always thought it was extraordinarily out of character . . .*

TED: That's like Spider-Man beating up on Flash Thompson, for no other reason than looking at a girl the wrong way. It's extremely out of character and diminishes the hero.

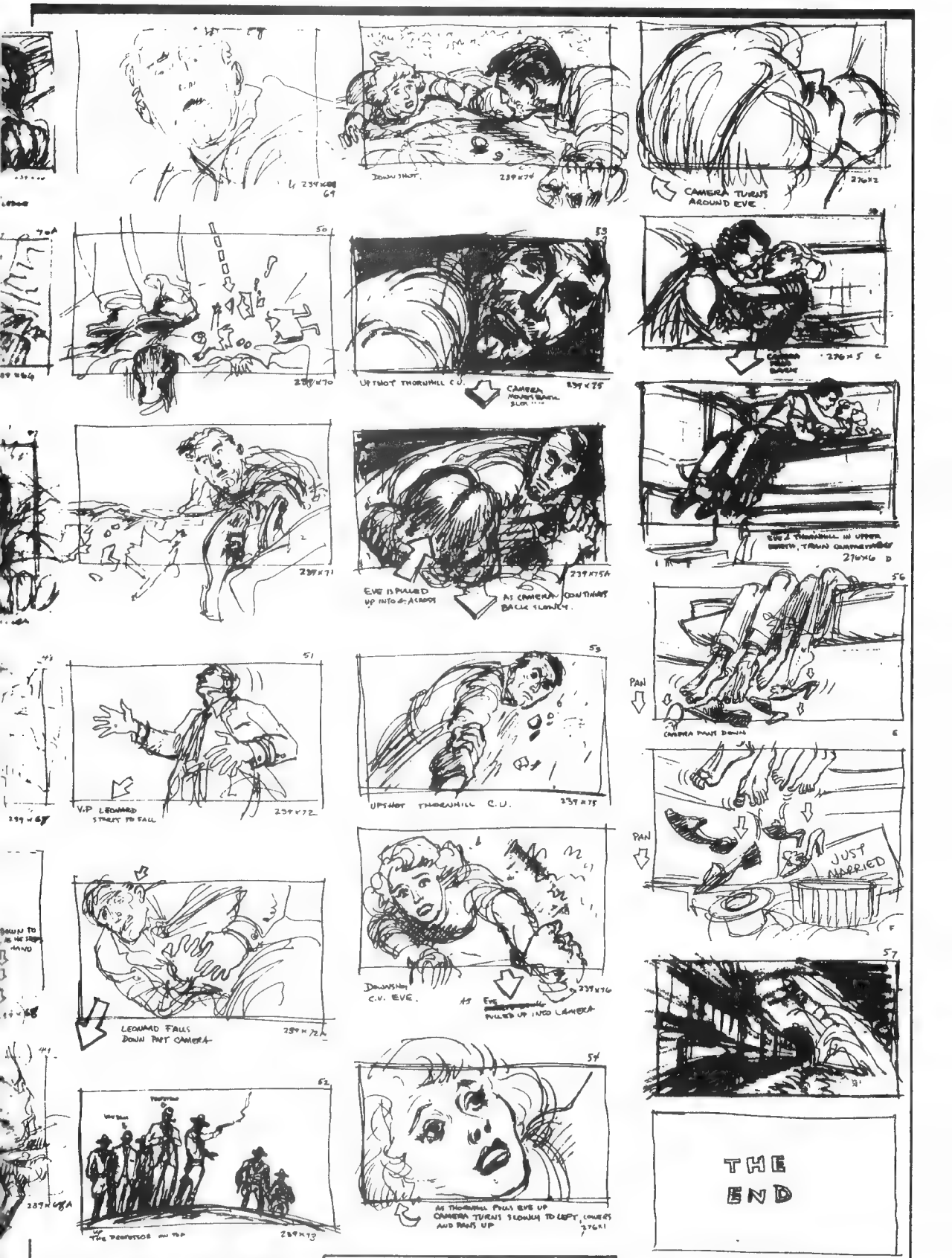
If you were to take the Clark Kent character — and there's a neat turning point in the film, when he's powerless and absolutely human — before he got his powers back, go back and pound the shit out of the bully, that would have been heroic, because it would have been him, not his superpowers.

It's a betrayal of the character; it may work in a cheap laugh sense, but that's all.

I happened to have read **Neal Ruttenberg**'s draft of SPIDER-MAN and there are a couple of things in there that I would take issue with. For example, as in the true origin, Peter — just after being bitten by the radioactive spider — leaps out of the way of a moving vehicle and lands on the side of a building, looks around and is astounded. It's a pretty neat scene; John and I used it. Anybody with any sense would use it. Neal has a line in there — I'm not picking on him, he's a good writer — where Peter says, "This is so weird. I feel like I'm tripping."

This is Peter Parker we're talking about; the strongest drug he ever took was Coca-Cola! It's way out of character.

up a bully, because 'Ha ha ha, it's the Man of Steel.'"



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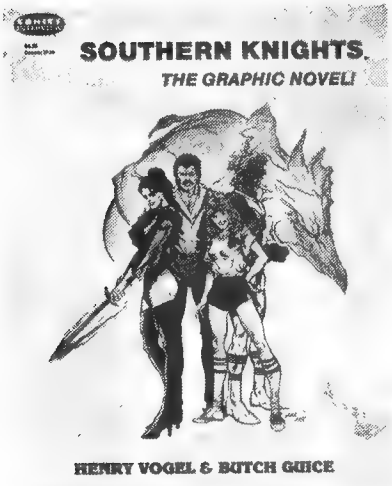

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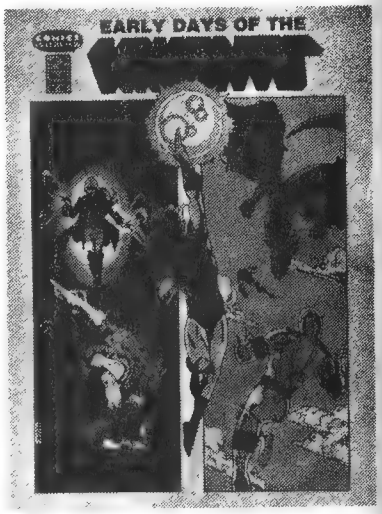

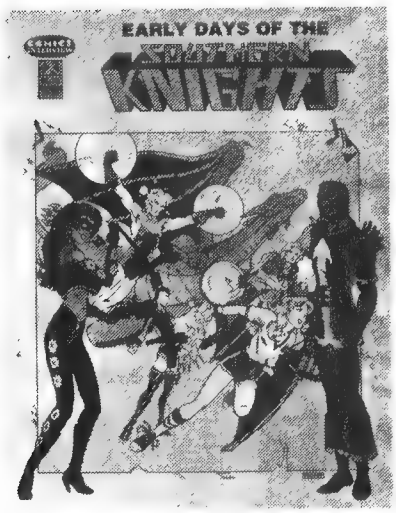

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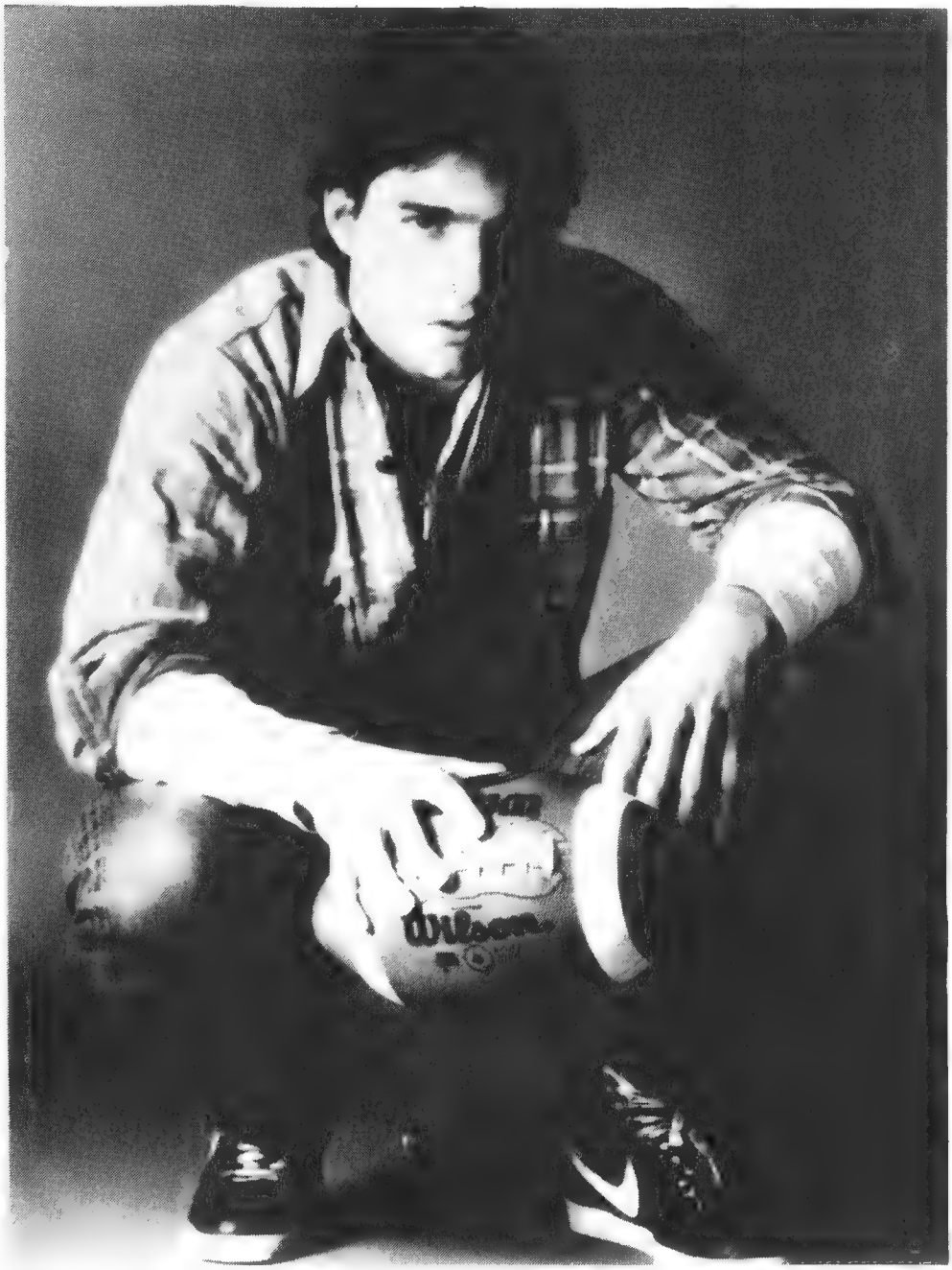
"Peter's room, with posters of Einstein and Van Halen."



Our dream cast for SPIDER-MAN: Tom Cruise had just made RISKY BUSINESS, and before that ALL THE RIGHT MOVES. He would have been perfect.

It's a judgment that you make as a writer, to change things, to whatever vision you've got. But there are also references to Peter's room, with posters of **Albert Einstein** and **Van Halen.** Well, this isn't the Peter Parker I know. I don't see Peter as somebody who would necessarily be up on rock 'n' roll. Peter is, and always has been, a nerd. Not so much now — but that was the beauty of the character: This is the guy who, in his heart and mind, is incapable of being a hero and this is thrust upon him. I can't imagine him being up on rock 'n' roll.

PAT: *I just wanted to get a feel for what you thought worked, to get an idea of where you were coming from in doing a SPIDER-MAN script.*

TED: I try to be true to the essence of the character, changing as few things as possible.

Briefly, let me back up before our involvement. I was privy to a treatment by a writer who I greatly admire, named **Leslie Stevens. Leslie Stevens** with **Joseph Stefano** created THE OUTER LIMITS, to my mind the definitive science-fiction anthology series. I read this treatment and really was appalled. Unless my memory and my brain totally fail me, what I was reading was a Peter Parker who becomes an eight-armed, hairy mutant and wants to kill himself

"The TV series managed to make Peter a standard hero."

over this. He's in love with the daughter of the evil Dr. Zyrex of Zyrex Laboratories, that we all know, where Peter Parker works as the photographer for the little ID badges. And Dr. Zyrex has this basement full of various mutants, of course, that he sends out one at a time to kill this Spider-Man thing. And Spider-Man at one point contemplates suicide and so forth and so on.

I was surprised because I really give **Leslie Stevens** much more credit than what I was seeing. More recently, I've spoken to other people who, in fact, knew **Leslie Stevens,** and a lot of this stuff was dictated by **Menahem Golan** — at least he sat down and dictated "This is how I see Spider-Man," because he didn't understand what it was. Was it a ninja or something? He had no idea. So what are you going to do? If somebody's paying you to write a story — and presumably paying you very well — do you sit down and explain to them, "No, this is a guy in a red-and-blue suit, who spins webs and so forth"?

PAT: *You give them what they asked for.*

TED: And I'm guessing that is what **Leslie Stevens** did — or perhaps I read a **Menahem Golan** rewrite of **Leslie Stevens'** work, which is possible.

PAT: *I guess we should all be grateful that movie didn't get made. I have a feeling that, if the people at Marvel have any kind of approval over what comes out, they'd never have approved that.*

TED: They didn't have much. They had sold the rights . . .

PAT: *Lock, stock and barrel?*

TED: Pretty much. Stan had approval on stuff, as an advisor. But on SPIDER-MAN, at the time — it may have changed — they could do whatever they wanted. They'd consult with him, ask him what he thought, and he'd either say, "No, it's awful!" or "Yeah, I like it," but he had no veto power. I'm guessing on this, but I agree with you, I'm glad that particular version didn't get made. We'll see what happens in the future.

Neal and I talked about this the other day: When they finally make the movie, I hope they have a screening where they invite all the writers who ever touched this project . . .

PAT: *They could fill the auditorium.*

TED: I'll have a seat somewhere in the back row . . .

PAT: *If they do it in order of when you worked on it?*

TED: Yeah.

Answering the question you posed previously, there are bad versions of this stuff that to me are unaccountable as to why anyone would want to do them and bleed out the elements that were attractive originally. A point in fact was the SPIDER-MAN TV series.

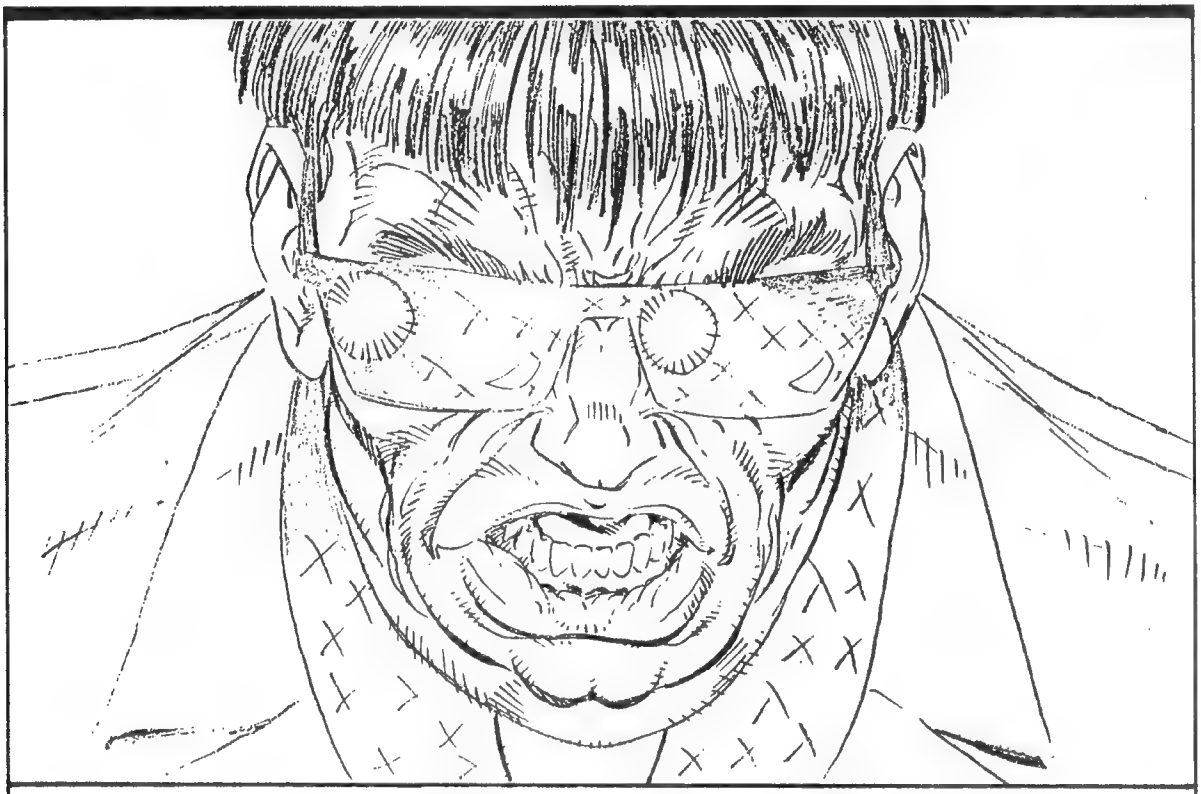
PAT: *I was going to ask you about that.*

TED: John and I sat down with a couple of tapes of that, before we started, and we just said, "All right. Let's make a note of everything in there — and not use any of it." They didn't have a lot of money, but you can still do a great deal without money. They managed to make Peter a standard hero . . .

PAT: *Although I always thought Nicholas Hammond was facially a good Peter Parker, based on the John Romita version.*

Ted's choice for the role of Doc Ock was Bob Hoskins — with a pair of goggles, he would have been great.

"The Japanese Spidey is an entirely different character."



Pencil original of Dr. Octopus, alias Otto Octavius, by Erik Larsen.

TED: I was gonna say, the **John Romita** version come to life. Absolutely. I kind of fancied **Tom Cruise;** this was five years ago, he'd be a bit pricey now.

Stan mentioned **Hammond** at the time. Now, he's probably too old and be out of the race.

But they took away all the elements that were fun in the comics and made this series where this guy's going around beating up on bad guys.

Did you ever see any of the Japanese SPIDER-MAN stuff?

PAT: *No, I never have. I've been told some of it's interesting.*

TED: It's an entirely different character; he does all sorts of things that Spider-Man over here does not do. I don't understand what the deal is.

PAT: *I've always thought one of the strangest cases of adapting comics to TV — one of completely leaching out everything that had anything to do with the comics version — was the Cathy Lee Crosby version of WONDER WOMAN.*

TED: Yeah, why call it WONDER WOMAN? Once you've eliminated the background people will be expecting, they're going to be disappointed. Call it "Super-Duper" or something and give them something else.

Ken Tobey's comment on the **John Carpenter** version of THE THING: "It's a good movie, but he should have called it 'Who Goes There?'" People are going to make that comparison. You don't walk into a movie with a title like SPIDER-MAN and then expect to see a hairy, eight-armed mutant. I don't know why movie makers do these things, but they do.

Casting: We were talking about **Bob Hoskins** as Dr. Octopus.

PAT: *This is five years ago you were talking about Hoskins? That's interesting — he wasn't that big then.*

TED: He'd just done MONA LISA and Joe suggested. I thought it was brilliant. There was a black actor — the older one in A SOLDIER'S STORY —

PAT: *Adolph Caesar — as Joe Robertson?*

TED: No, we wanted him for our major cop character. Just dream casting. Fortunately, we were in a position of almost doing it.

PAT: *I think we've covered SPIDER-MAN; I'd like to find out what you've done since.*

TED: Immediately after finishing the SPIDER-MAN script, as I said, we were told to read some WORLD'S FINESTs and I said "Whoa!" I went home and immediately did a treatment for what I wanted to do in a SUPERMAN IV movie. My partner, **John Brancato,** was not enthusiastic about it, because he didn't want to spend his life writing about super-heroes. I understand that. And as it turned out, a week later they hired two other guys.

Well, I left that treatment in the computer — I don't think I ever printed it out — and pulled it out a couple of years ago when the lawsuit came up with the two guys who said **Christopher Reeve** stole all their material, that he obviously did their script, etc.

I pulled out my treatment and went over it, point by point. I'd seen the movie and said, "I'll be damned!' because they hit maybe ten major beats and ten other minor characters and plot points that I would have hit, had John and I done SUPERMAN IV.

I point this out because lawsuits like this are very often nonsense — and I think that's probably the case here. The question of spontaneous creation — a certain idea crops up and 15 people have it at the same time — is always there. So many of my ideas are in SUPERMAN IV: well, there's only so many ways you could have gone after III. You've got to go back and to some other version of the character, because they joked it up in II

"Spider-Man is basically a pretty likable

Cast and crew from B-MOVIE MONSTER. Left to right, Armando Sylvestri, prop man; Wayne Berwick, director; Mark Wolf, fx and cinematographer; Kenneth Tobey, Brinke Stevens, Ted Newsom, Ron Wilson and John Goodwin.

and III. You've got to have the character go through certain personal changes, otherwise you've got no reason to watch this thing.

It's not necessarily theft — given a set of circumstances, there's only so many things you can do. I wish both sides luck: one side to prove that **Christopher Reeve** was stupid enough to open a script, take a whole bunch of notes, then send it back saying, "I don't want to do this," then sit down with two writers and say "Here's my idea." My sympathies to these two hopeful writers, on the other hand, who were taken advantage of by the Hollywood system.

I spoke to one of the two guys who have script credit on SUPERMAN IV and asked, "What exactly did **Christopher Reeve** do?" "Oh, he came in with ideas, we'd nod and ignore him, and he'd go away." *(Laughter.)* I'm sure he felt his input was greater, but those guys are good writers and I don't see a lot of writing credits for **Christopher Reeve.** It was probably a deal where he wanted to be known as more than an actor, and did have some input. I doubt whether anyone stole anything.

After that, we did DECATHLON, which eventually became DEATHCATHLON, when it landed at New World and **Neal Ruttenberg** rewrote it.

A year or so later, John and I wrote SUB-MARINER for New World and had a blast with it — because by then we were good writers. Again, we were in the same sort of position, we have to introduce the character and the background to everyone who doesn't know what's going on. Though there may be several million comic fans who know exactly what's happening with Sub-Mariner . . .

PAT: *It's not like Superman or Batman where everybody knows the history as a part of a sort of ingrained growing up.*

TED: This was a more interesting challenge than Spider-Man, because Spider-Man, although complex in his own deeply warped psychological way, is basically a likeable character. Sub-Mariner is just an asshole. That's the beauty of it. He has no patience with anybody. You're dealing primarily with a protagonist who is utterly unlikeable. It's a neat challenge, to make an unlikeable character admirable.

PAT: *I always thought the way I would do a Sub-Mariner picture would be to do it not necessarily from his point of view. In the classic story where he comes in and trashes New York Harbor, I'd go from the viewpoint of the chief of the harbor police and Sub-Mariner keeps showing up and giving this man headaches. Eventually, Sub-Mariner comes out on top as the chief discovers Sub-Mariner has a point. Sub-Mariner would be almost more a motive force than the protagonist.*

Just my writer's mind working.

TED: It might work. The only thing I can relate that to is **Ian Fleming's** THE SPY WHO LOVED ME, in which Bond is no longer the operative character, he is a force who comes into it. That, to me, is the one **Fleming** novel that doesn't work on the level of a James Bond book. I don't say the idea is necessarily bad; it's a pretty good little book and if you change the name of the Bond character, it would work rather well.

The problem I have with a film in

character. Sub-Mariner is just an asshole."

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which the Sub-Mariner is a relatively minor character is that a lot of people will feel cheated after they've laid out their seven dollars. "I've been watching the harbor master for an hour and a half; where's the guy with the wings?"

PAT: (Laughter.) *I see your point.*

TED: As with Spidey, we did Sub-Mariner, introducing him to an audience who does not know him. Again, as per SPIDER-MAN, we worked from a basic story that Stan had done, then went off from there.

His story, as I recall, which he read in ecstatic and exciting terms — he's won-

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"Namor gets locked up in an insane asylum."

derful to tell us what he wanted to see — was that there's atomic testing in the Atlantic, it destroys half of Atlantis, so Sub-Mariner comes up and wreaks vengeance on the world. That was pretty much it — about two or three paragraphs, delivered in Stan's inimitable style.

We set to work, changing any number of things, but basically trying to keep that excitement.

Our major problem — it being at the time 1987 — was that there were not at the time any atomic tests being conducted in any ocean, nor had there ever been any atomic tests in the Atlantic Ocean. There are probably a lot of people on the Eastern Seaboard who'd get really annoyed about that. "Hey, what's that? Martha, we got a mushroom cloud!" Wouldn't want to do that.

So instead we created a Star Wars-ish weapon that used sound that migrated through the ocean to destroy submarines. Unfortunately, where they're aiming it also destroys two-thirds of Atlantis, which we have seen breifly because we have seen the Sub-Mariner coming of age; he's about 25 or so. We see him in the middle of this Atlantis that is enclosed but sort of semi-aquatic . . . as opposed to doing everything underwater — which would be a terrific technical problem and would be pretty boring. As gorgeous as underwater photography can be, you can't move fast in water. The whole last half-hour of THUNDERBALL and NEVER SAY NEVER AGAIN, most of THE ABYSS — it's like everybody's on Quaaludes.

So we had to invent a different Atlantis; one that's enclosed with half-Atlanteans, half-mermen, a different race entirely. The evil warlord Krang is the heavy in Atlantis; he wants to usurp the throne. He can't do that because the Queen Mother is still around and Prince Namor is about ready to ascend the throne but, of course, Krang loathes this half-breed. And, as in the comics, Namor himself is not crazy about being half-human.

Krang tricks Namor into heading to the surface and waging war on them. Krang's going to wait until Namor's out of town, get this old submarine that's nearby and get the secrets of the surface people's sound weapon. The deal here is that the Atlanteans have never interfaced with the surface at all, so you have Namor hitting the surface near Martha's Vineyard and he is ready to declare war. He's looking for the king of the surface so he can formally announce the war. He walks up on the beach — there's a girl playing a radio, with little bed-and-breakfasts in the background — and he's puzzled. You've got the element of a fish out of water, as it were . . . and an innocent only in that he doesn't know this place. He's really a nasty, haughty character who has no patience for what he's seeing.

Adolph Caesar was considered as our long-suffering NYPD cop.

Namor gets locked up in an insane asylum because he's walking up to people and telling them, "I'm the prince of Atlantis." *(Laughter.)* And there are not a lot of people who believe him. One psychiatrist, who becomes the love interest, begins to understand that there is something extremely odd about this guy and starts to believe him.

PAT: *He's got wings on his ankles!*

TED: Well, we dropped the wings right away — that would have been a tip-off that there was something peculiar about him. Namor could swim awfully fast, he could communicate with other sea animals and he was immensely strong — and the longer he stayed away from the ocean the weaker he got.

There is again a case of taking the existing material and playing with it to anticipate certain problems. Wings on the ankles would be a dead giveaway that this guy is not human. Also — how far could he fly?

So, anyway, Krang decides to blow up

"Against his judgment, Namor has to battle for the Earth."

Sub-Mariner, by Jack Kirby, Alan Weiss and the present artist, Rich Buckler.

the world because he's captured a nuclear sub, he sails into Boston harbor — and against his better judgment (having been locked away in a lunatic asylum for a while), Namor has to battle in defense of the Earth.

Of course, Krang has no idea what's going on on the surface either. He doesn't know there's like 10 billion people out there. He knows only that this certain book that he's salvaged from Namor's father's lost submarine — the Thresher — that if you set off these rockets they'll blow up people. He's just delighted.

There were other minor changes, some of which Stan was not happy with. We named his mother Antinea — legendarily the Queen of Atlantis. **Maria Montez** played her once and I think there was an **Edgar Almer/Fritz Lang** picture in the '60s, SIREN OF ATLANTIS. Stan objected to that because he had established that Namor's mother's name was Fen. My feeling is that there wouldn't be a great many people who would know one way or the other and more who know that "fen" means swamp.

We had a gas. We were working with Stan and a brilliant producer named **Steve White,** who was vice-president at New World at the time. I say that without reservation, because I've dealt with intelligent people and I've dealt with absolute bozos over the past ten years, and Steve was brilliant. Another person was **Tony Randel,** also a vice-president, equally canny and excited about the project with incredibly good suggestions.

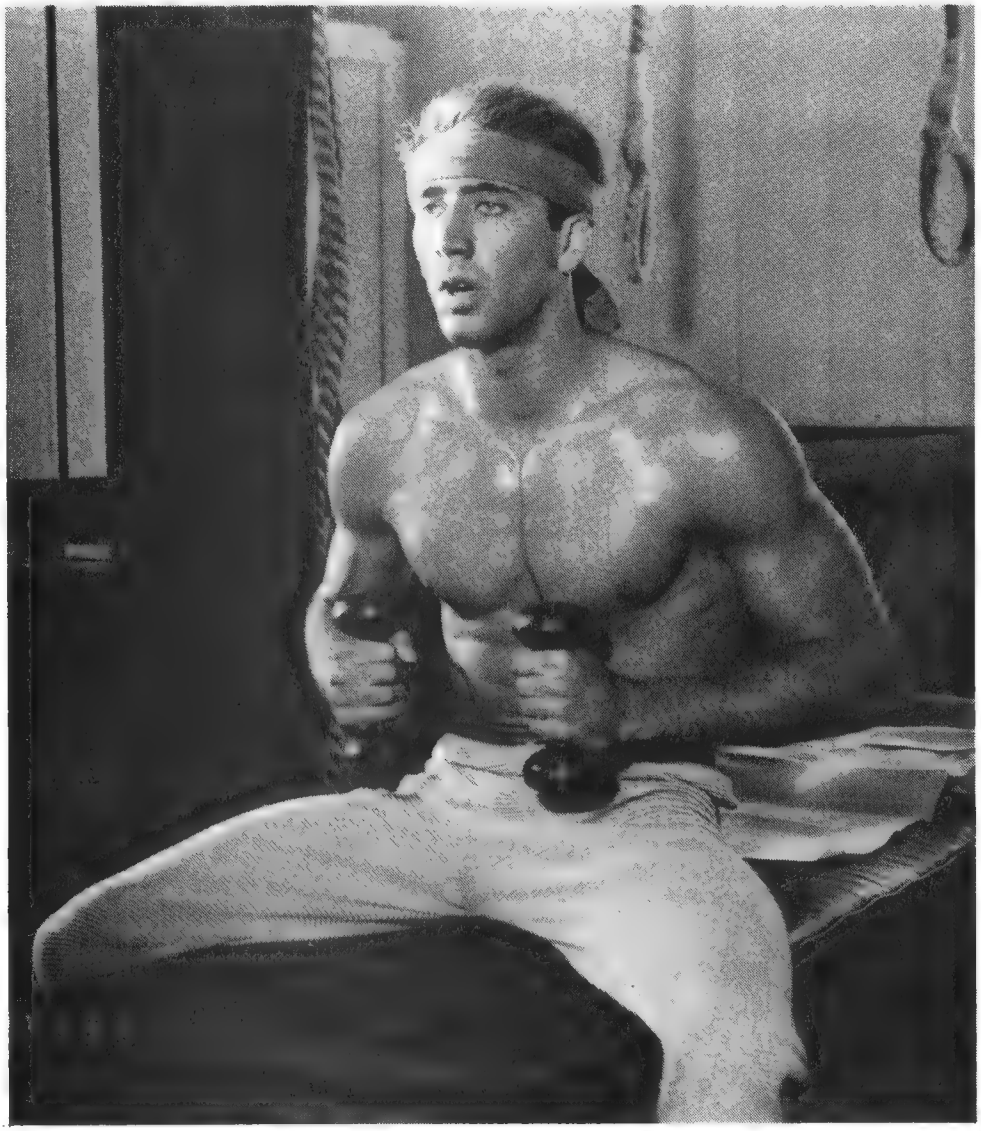
It's lovely to work with people like that, who you don't have to argue with, who you can bounce ideas off of or take suggestions from; as opposed to trying to deal with someone who wants Spider-Man to be an eight-armed hairy mutant beating up on Flash Thompson. It's a joy to work with people who are that smart.

PAT: *Where does the SUB-MARINER script stand now?*

TED: New World had financial troubles; they had all sorts of Marvel things in development, this being among them. I don't think I'm overstating by saying that New World does not make motion pictures anymore. Their television department makes money, their video department makes money, but I haven't seen any New World productions in the last six months or so.

I think they optioned the character out

"I'll be directing a picture called METAMORPH."



For the lead in the SUB-MARINER, producer Steve White had considered Nicolas Cage. This still from 20th Century Fox's A BOY IN BLUE.

to independent producers. The last time I spoke to Stan about it — about six months ago — **Earl Owensby** had optioned the script. I'm assuming it's still our script; I've not heard that **Neal Ruttenberg** has been assigned to rewrite it. *(Laughter.)* **Earl Owensby** has a large production facility in South Carolina and makes films like ROTTWEILER, THE 3-D DOGS FROM HELL and I WAS ELVIS'S CLONE. I'm kidding, but only slightly. He made quite a lot of money for years, making movies that were never shown anywhere but the South . . .

PAT: *Drive-in movies?*

TED: Absolutely. On the basis of that, he established this production facility in South Carolina.

At this point, SUB-MARINER doesn't seem to be anywhere. It just sort of went — (farting noise for the transcriber).

PAT: *The usual comic-book transcription of that is something like 'PHBBBTT!"*

TED: After SUB-MARINER, John Brancato and I parted company amicably. We have separate interests and he did not want to be typed as a writer of super-hero shows — nor do I, or anybody. There was the idea that we might do IRON MAN; neither of us could see much excitement there.

But what have I done lately? I wrote and produced a film called ATTACK OF THE B-MOVIE MONSTER, a tribute to the '50s giant-monster-on-the-loose movies. **Ken Tobey** and **John Agar, Robert Shayne** and **Robert Cornthwaite** and **Ann Robinson** were all in it. Just the most wonderful, expensive home movie ever made! It was basically done as a hoot! They all donated their time and I had the money to spend on film stock. It was done as a promotional piece; I'd like to do it for real someday, it's basically AIRPLANE meets GODZILLA.

I produced a show called MONSTERS AND MANIACS, a compilation of horror and science-fiction stuff that's in release now.

At the end of this month, I'll be directing a picture called METAMORPH, a conspiracy/horror/science-fiction thing where we'll turn several people into awful monsters. Extremely low-budget, but it should be a hoot.

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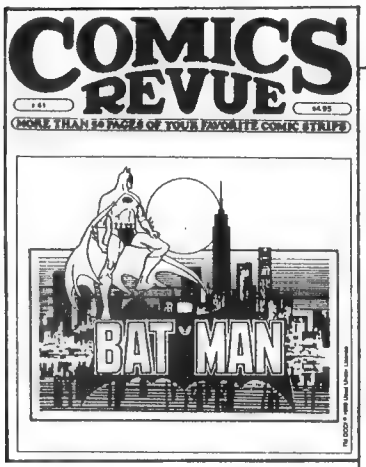

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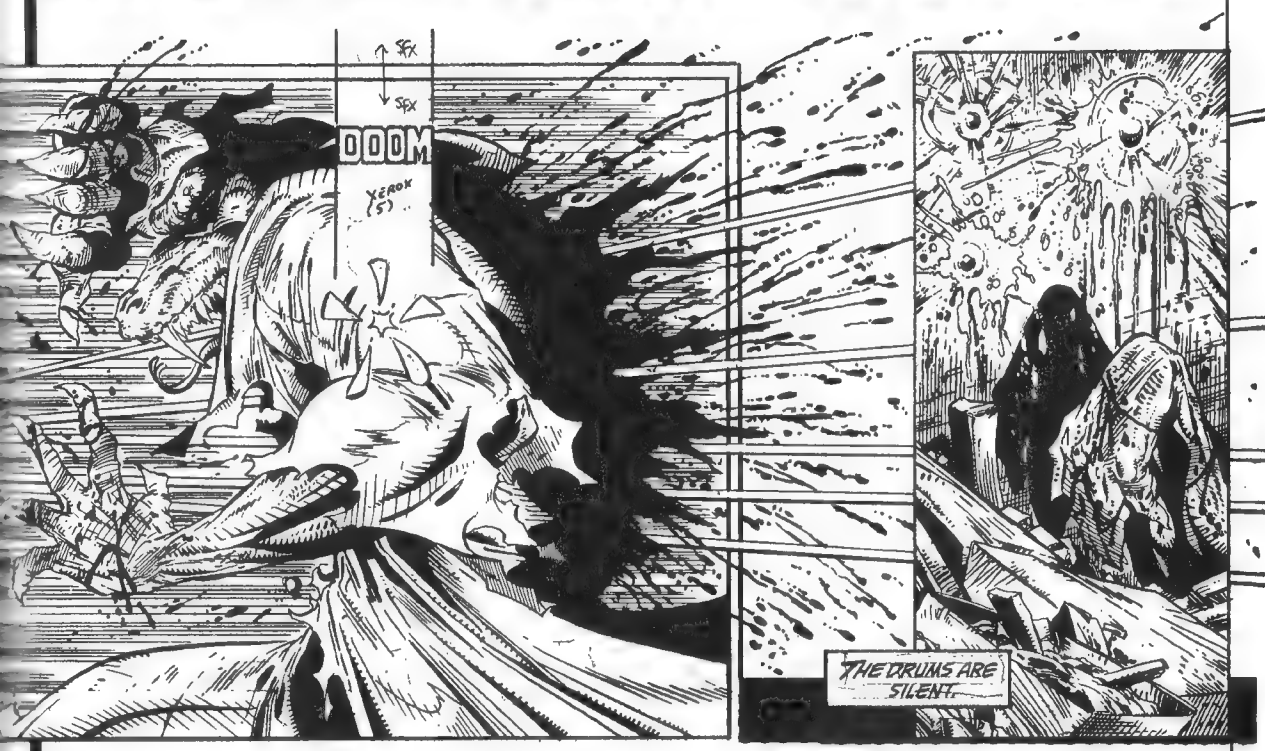

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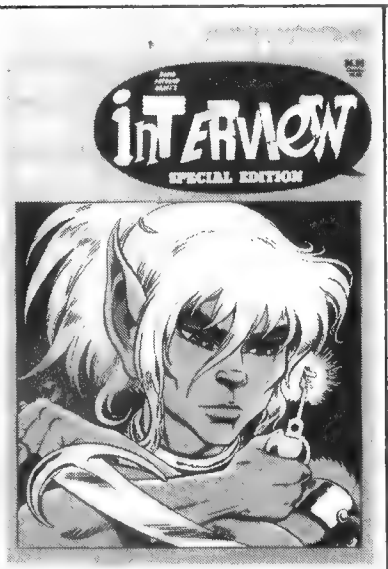
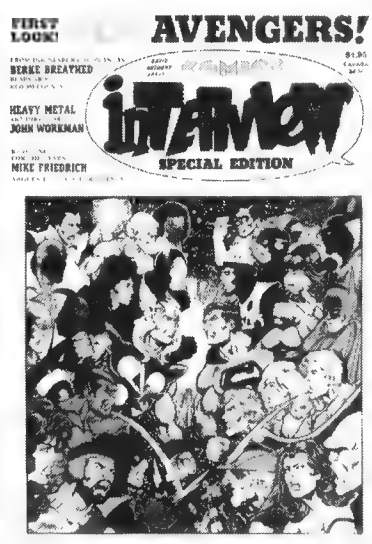
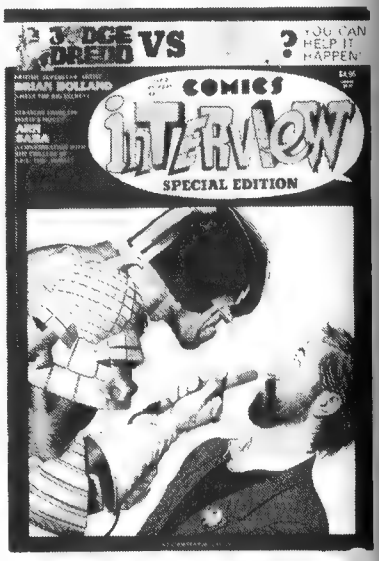


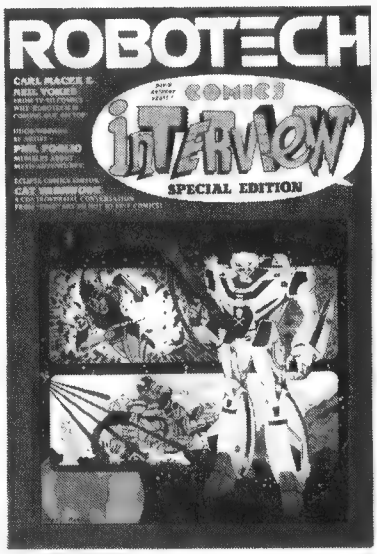
ELFQUEST. A pow-wow with the Pinis on Elfquest, the creation of an elfin world. John Costanza, letterer, tells all of being an artist. Stan Lee goes Hollywood, and the beginning of a legend now the Comico bunch, on their dreams and schemes for the future. Pini cover.



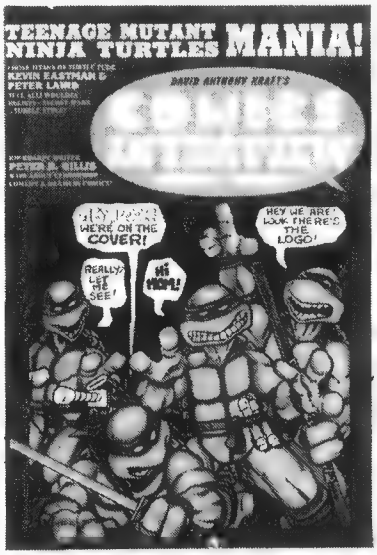
JLA-AVENGERS. George Perez and Roy Thomas tell all about a project that never saw print. Perez's never printed art, only available here! Also John Workman on Heavy Metal, Berke Breathed on Bloom County, Mike Friedrich on the biz end. Perez cover.



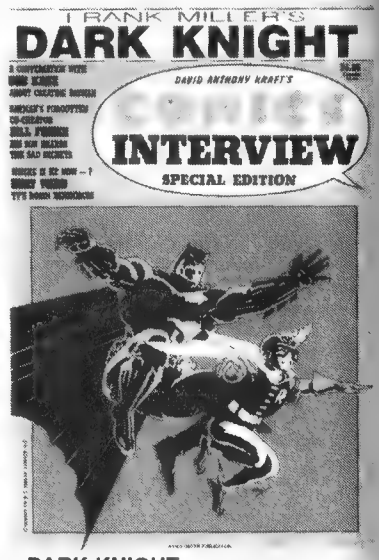
JUDGE DREDD VS BATMAN. Brian Bolland spills the beans on this project, first time round. Arn Saba saddles Neil the Horse. Don and Maggie Thompson give an inside view of the Comics Buyer's Guide. Bolland cover.



ROBOTECH. Carl Macek & Neil Vokes - from TV to comics - tell why Robotech's a hit. Phil Foglio - Hugo Award winning Sci-Fi artist mumbles about Myth-Adventures, and Cat Yronwode on art for art sake and comics for comics sake. More. Vokes & Rankin cover.



TEENAGE NINJA MUTANT TURTLES. Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird give it up. How Turtles Mania began..(look where it went..) Stan Drake on the colorful career of his girls, Kelly Green and Blondie. Peter B. Gillis on censorship, comedy & death! Eastman & Laird cover.



DARK KNIGHT. Frank Miller expounds on his magnum opus. Fred Finger, on his father, Bill. Bob Kane, on the last 50 yrs since Bat birth. Jerry Robinson, on past memories. Burt Ward on the trouble with tights, and George Roussos on the early days. Miller cover.

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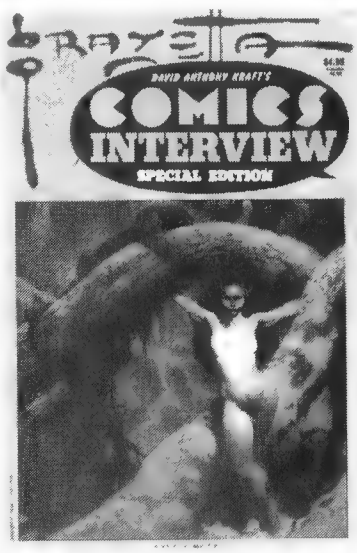

FRAZETTA. Frank Frazetta. This artist of great renown shares his thoughts on many media from comics to fine art. Frazetta cover.

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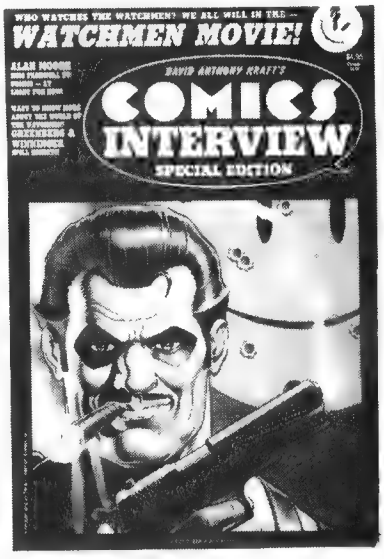
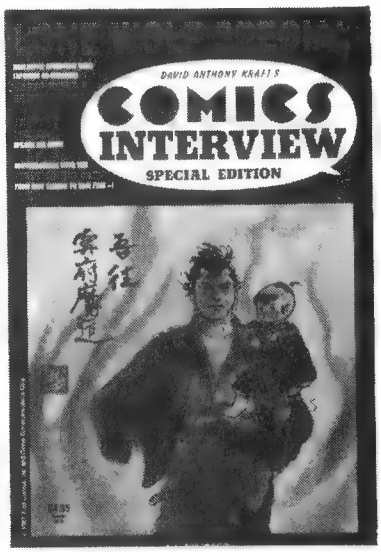
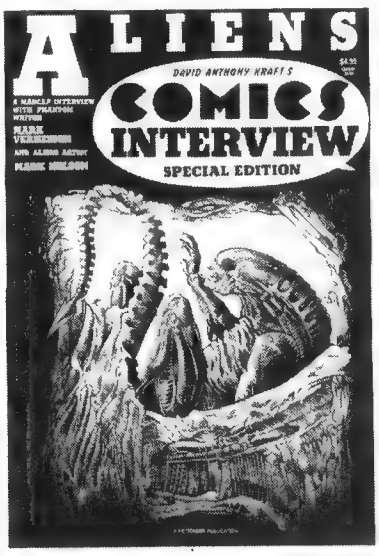


WATCHMEN. Alan Moore reveals what he thinks of super-heroes, and talks about his controversial creation. Daniel Greenberg and Ray Winninger on the WATCHMEN game modules. Hank Rose on the secrets of a marketeer. Dave Gibbons cover.



LONE WOLF. Frank Miller speaks his mind. Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima, creators of a Japanese legend, in a talk from Tokyo. Plus First Comics crew Rick Obadiah, Kurt Goldzung, Alex Wald, Paul Guinan, Willie Schubert and Rick Oliver. Kojima cover.



ALIENS. Mark Nelson and Mark Verheiden point out the positive and negative problems of dealing with Aliens. Mike Richardson and Randy Stradley on directing a Dark Horse, and managing freelance talent. Nelson cover.

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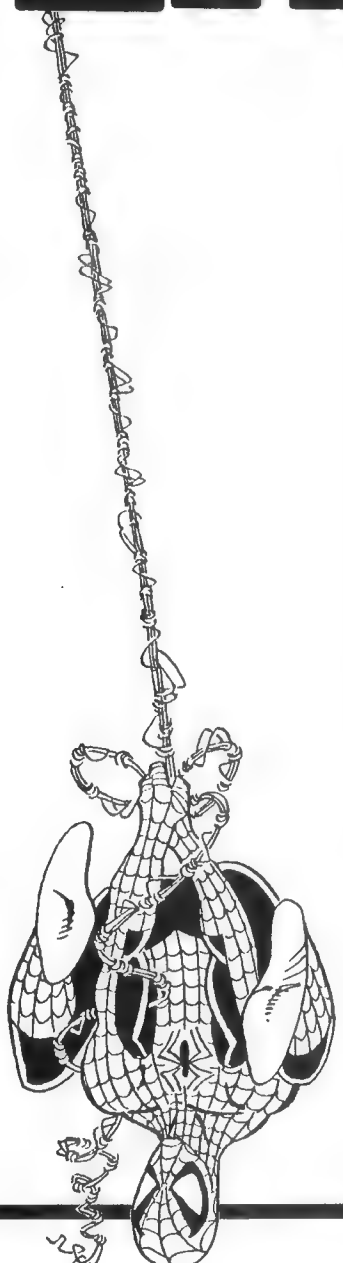
"I was always a big Steve Ditko fan,

ERIK LARSEN



Not many artists can go from being reviled for their work on a first assignment for a major publisher to handling the flagship assignment for another major publisher in just a couple of years. That's what happened to Erik Larsen — from a stint on DOOM PATROL that garnered universally poor reviews to pencilling THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN, following up on the work of fan-favorite Todd McFarlane. Sounds like a heady experience for the West Coast-based, self-taught Larsen, so that's where our conversation started, with his feelings on becoming the artist for Marvel's web-spinner . . .

PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL: *You're now handling what is probably considered Marvel's flagship character — Spider-Man. An awful lot of very big names have worked on that book: Steve Ditko, John Romita, as examples. You're following close on the heels of an artist who became a fan favorite, Todd McFarlane — who is going to continue doing the character in another title. How does that affect you; do you have any feelings regarding comparisons of your work with theirs?*

ERIK LARSEN: In terms of most of the guys you mentioned, I don't fear comparison. The people who are reading the book are mostly young, I think — there are a few long-time readers. I think most of the comparison is going to be with Todd, because all the rest is far enough back that people won't even pick up on it.

The only pressure is going head-to-head with Todd . . . and somebody's gotta do it! *(Laughter.)*

PAT: *Like all the people who had to follow Frank Miller on DAREDEVIL . . .*

ERIK: It was either get somebody to do it or stick in reprints. *(Laughter.)* Todd left the book to do something else, they created a new SPIDER-MAN title just for him. Somebody had to fill the void, so there you go. I was able to do it, so I will.

PAT: *I'm familiar with most of your work; I was following your stuff on DOOM PATROL . . .*

ERIK: You were the one . . . !

PAT: *Yeah . . . that was me, buying the book . . . as well as the Excalibur run you did in MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS. I have heard your work compared to Todd's, to Walt Simonson's at times. What do you consider to be your influences?*

ERIK: I'd put Walt in there, definitely. I was a big **Steve Ditko** fan, a big **Gil Kane** fan, a big **Jack Kirby** fan. All that stuff comes into play, although this book does

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Erik Larsen
Education: High-school dropout, self-taught in art
Influences: Jack Kirby, Gil Kane, Walt Simonson
Favorite Character: Nova
Credits: DNAGENTS, THOR, MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS, DOOM PATROL, AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
Advice to Would-Be Comic Artists: "Get in through the back door. Do stuff for whoever will hire you."

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a big Gil Kane fan, a big Jack Kirby fan."

not lend itself to some of those influences, but **Kirby** and **Simonson** are sort of tough. That's not the way the book is. Spider-Man's not eight feet wide and 900 pounds.

Following Todd, I'm trying to keep it somewhat consistent, so that the reader who's not paying attention to the credit boxes will just think, "Hmmm, he's being inked differently this month."

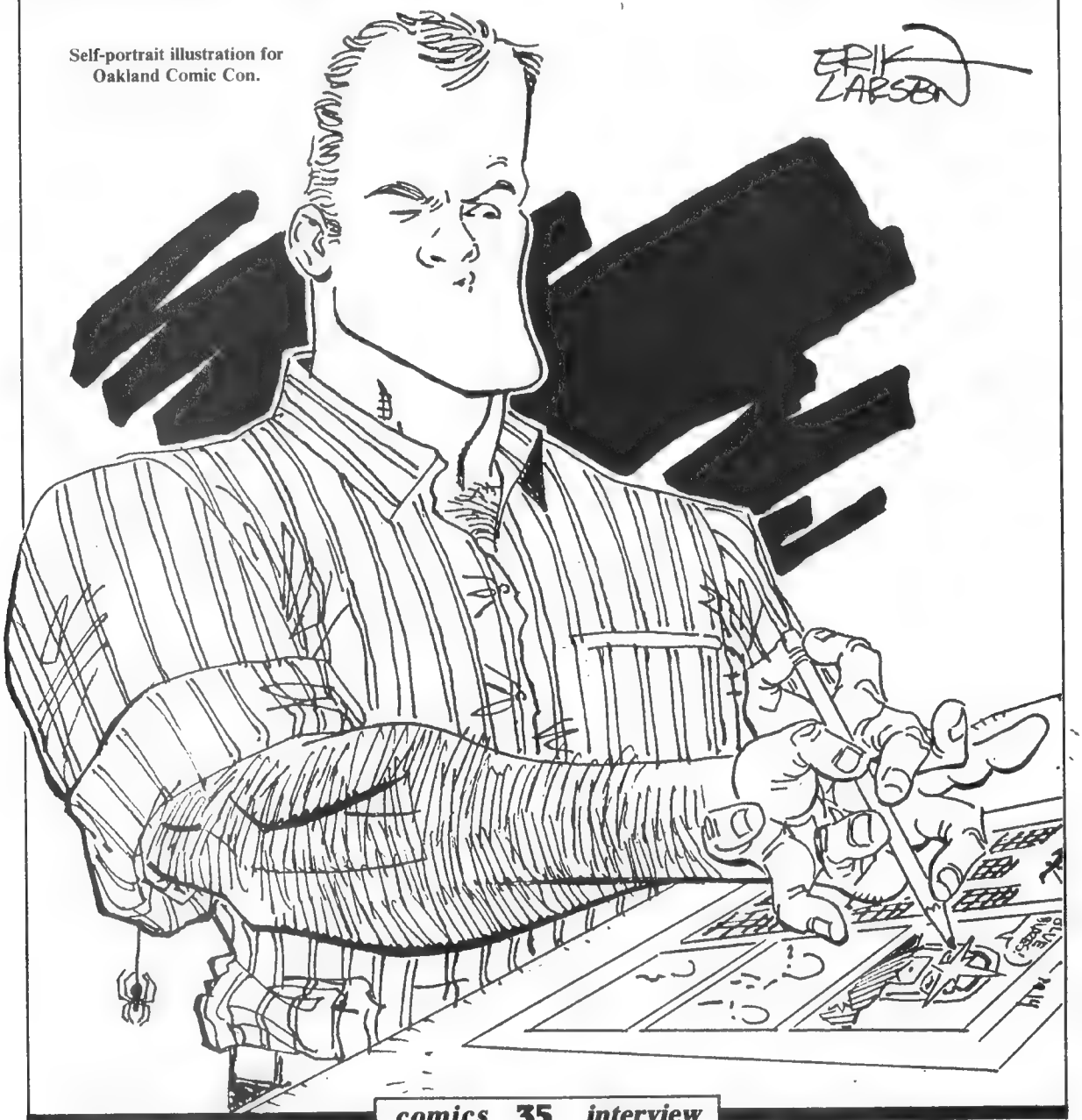
PAT: *You don't want to have a jarring disruption in the visual continuity.*

ERIK: On DOOM PATROL, I was hired to do the book, as they waited for **Steve Lightle** to self-destruct because he took so long to do the first issue, and the second . . . that they were just waiting for everything to catch up with him. They were hoping to get six issues out of him, they ended up with five.

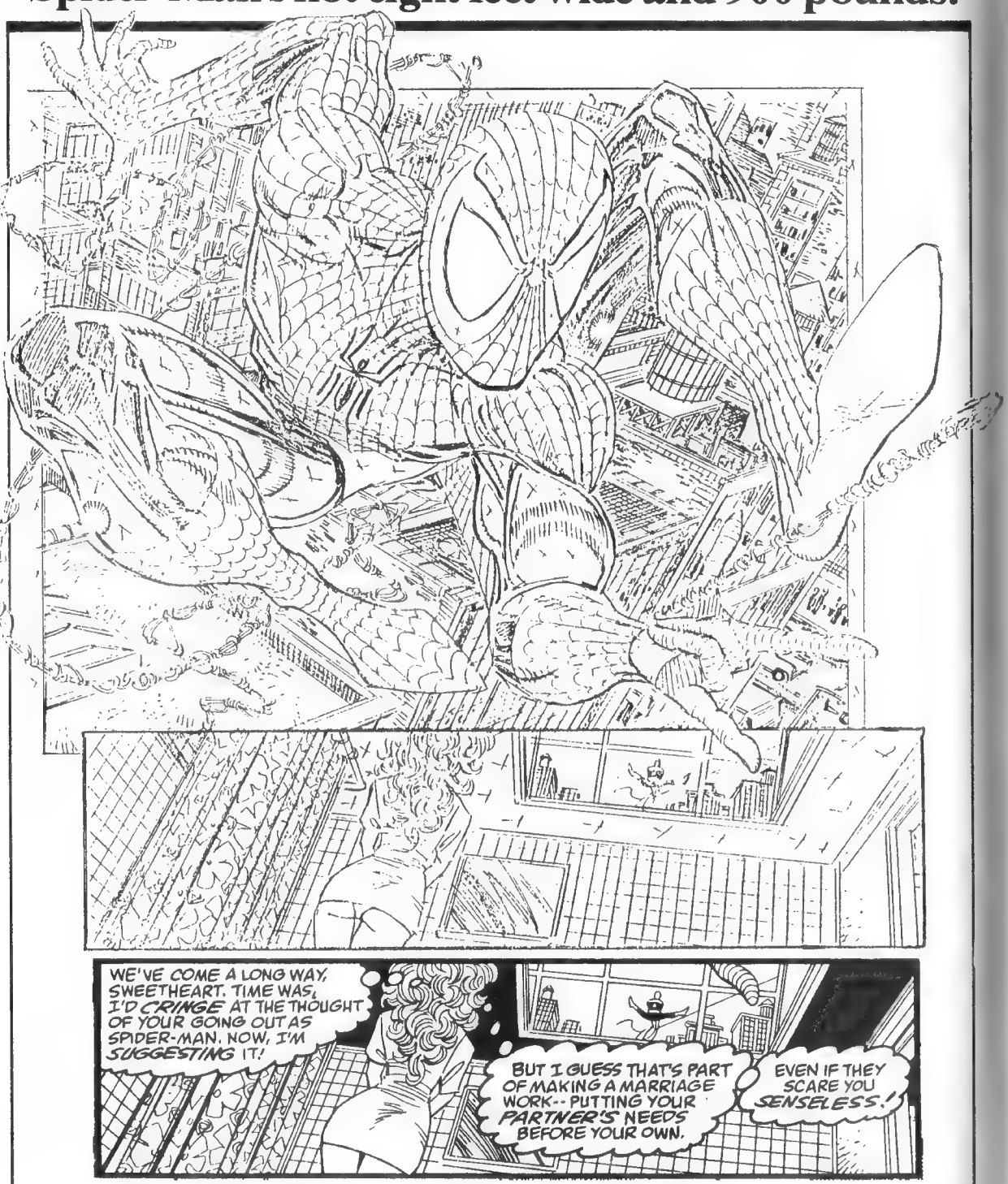
They gave me a fill-in type story that had the Doom Patrol with the Suicide Squad. After that I did more fill-ins: SUPERMAN, a short run on THE OUTSIDERS. At that time, I had gotten interested in **Keith Giffen's** stuff, his simplistic way of dealing with things, high contrast, things like that. In addition, I had no idea who would be inking the stuff, so I said, "Why don't I try to make my work completely inkable? Get rid of all the rendering and make it kind of cartoony?" I was also looking at **Michael Golden's** work at the time. So that last issue of THE OUTSIDERS was this **Giffeny, Goldeny, Larseny** stuff and from there I went to DOOM PATROL, thinking, "I don't care what **Steve Lightle** was doing; I'm going to do this book my way." BOOM! The black guy gained 60 pounds between issues, Robotman lost a bunch of pounds and got this huge jaw. The readers reacted pretty negatively.

So, this time I'm playing it safe. People are reading it for Todd, so I'll give them a

Self-portrait illustration for Oakland Comic Con.



"Spider-Man's not eight feet wide and 900 pounds."


WE'VE COME A LONG WAY, SWEETHEART. TIME WAS, I'D CRINGE AT THE THOUGHT OF YOUR GOING OUT AS SPIDER-MAN. NOW, I'M SUGGESTING IT!
BUT I GUESS THAT'S PART OF MAKING A MARRIAGE WORK-- PUTTING YOUR PARTNER'S NEEDS BEFORE YOUR OWN.
EVEN IF THEY SCARE YOU SENSELESS.!

Before and after example from SPIDER-MAN — Note Mary Jane's buns!

little bit of Todd and ease them into my stuff. By now, it's mine — I draw a little like Todd anyway; some people have said to me, "You're still doing Todd a little, aren't you?" To which I answer, "Well, if I take it any farther, I'll be doing things just to make it different from Todd, not the way it's natural for me to do it."

I was just up at Todd's and he said he'd like to see me do something other than Spider-Man so I could bring something new to it. It's tough; you're stuck between a rock and a hard place. Go to one extreme, do everything different from what Todd did, and you alienate a lot of readers. If you do it just the way he did it, then you're going to piss off some people, including Todd.

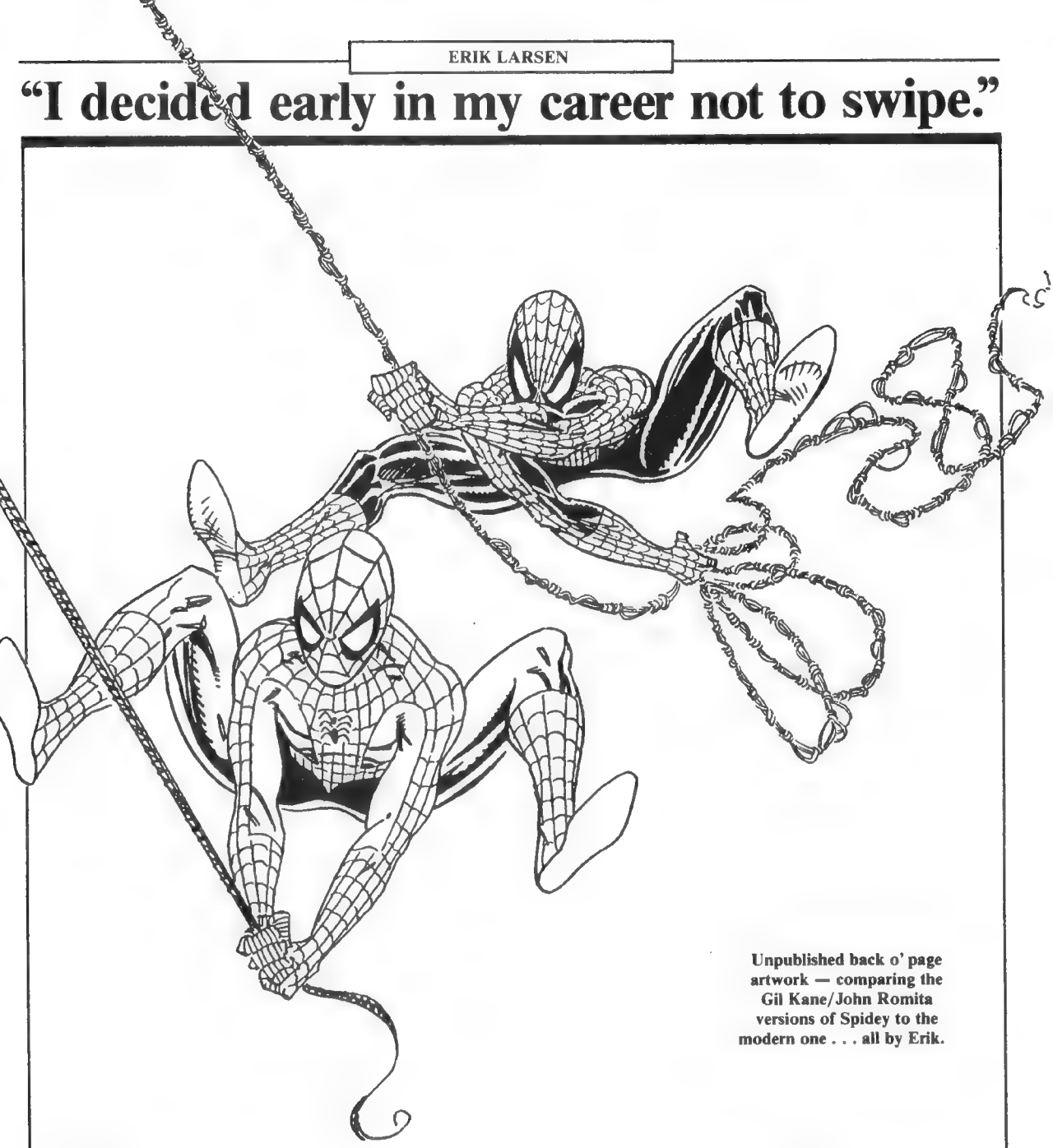
PAT: *Or you get stuck in the Ron Frenz syndrome . . . where it seems like everything Ron draws looks like Kirby*

Unpublished last page for PUNISHER #25.

(PANEL 3)
HE'S GETTING INCREDIBLY DEM. THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO BEAT HIM AND THAT IS TO DO THIS... SAVE INNOCENTS AND ALL THAT
(THOR (TH)) ANOTHER STRONG JIM GETTING PERILOUS
GET UP AND FIGHT
THOR (TH) I'VE GOT TO GO FOR MJOLNIR!
HULK: WHAT THE...?
NOW LET'S FINISH THIS HULK. PREPARE TO GET HURT!
BAH. FIGHT IS ALREADY OVER. HULK HAS WON.
HULK BEAT YOU AND YOU KNOW IT. YOU COULDN'T STOP HULK WITHOUT HAMMER!

Pencil material from MARVEL FANFARE — Erik's first job for Marvel, later inked by Vinnie Colletta.

"I decided early in my career not to swipe."



Unpublished back o' page artwork — comparing the Gil Kane/John Romita versions of Spidey to the modern one . . . all by Erik.

pencilled it.

ERIK: There are guys who are just swipe artists. You look at a page and say, "Yeah, I remember that panel!"

PAT: *Before I decided my talents lay in writing, I tried to be an artist and I was swiping Gil Kane left and right. Every once in a while I'll look at someone's work and say, "Gee, he liked that fight sequence, too."*

ERIK: The problem occurs when you can't find the picture you need and have to make it up and these guys aren't quite good enough to fake it. You're reading a story by Joe Schmoe and suddenly you come across the **Kane** swipe that looks out of place.

PAT: *Or worse, when he has been swiping constantly, he suddenly has to draw a panel without a source, so you get this piece of bad drawing in the middle of an otherwise okay story. If you didn't recognize the swipes all along, you don't know what's happened.*

ERIK: I decided early in my career not to swipe. So if something comes out looking like somebody else, it's coincidence.

PAT: *Where did you get your education and training?*

ERIK: I have none, really. There you go, end of answer.

PAT: *Then let's get to the real basics — where do you hail from?*

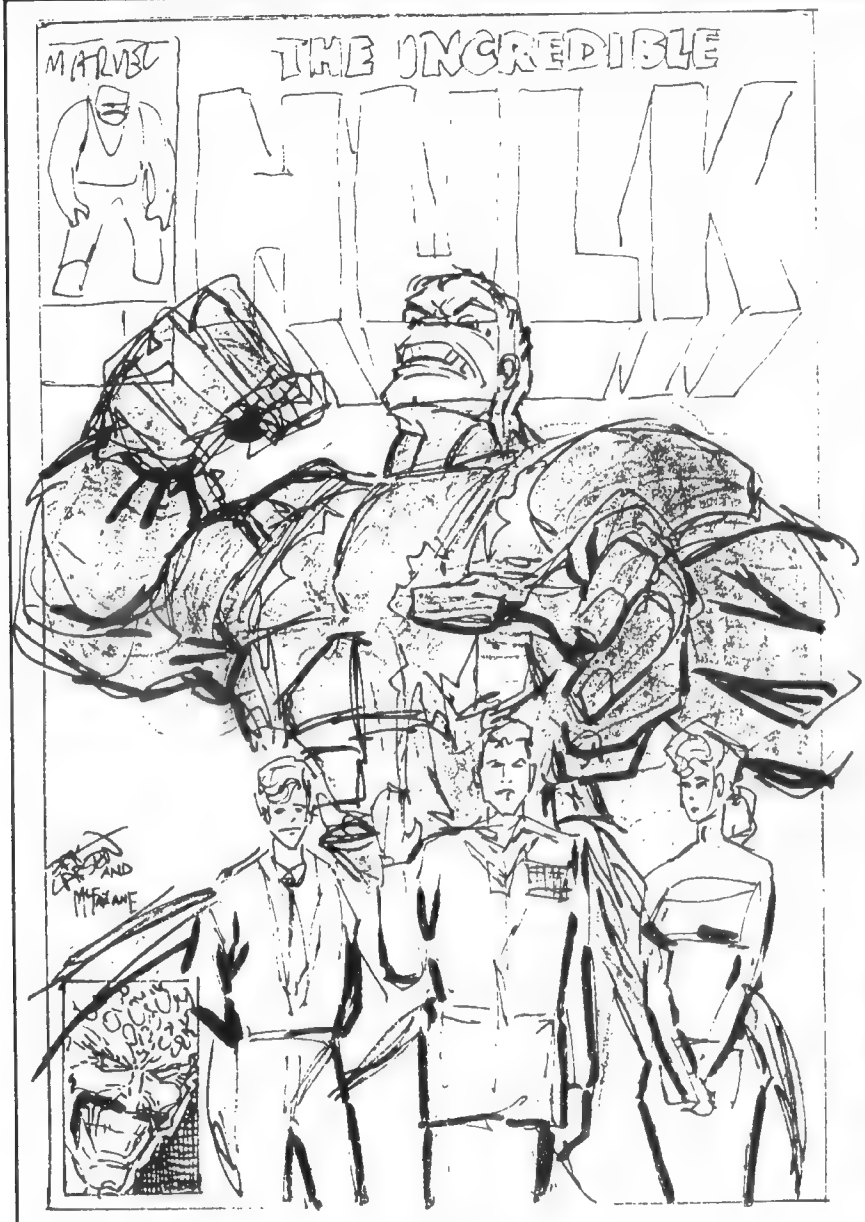
ERIK: I sort of hail from all over. My family moved around a bit. My dad is a teacher, still is. I grew up in Mendocino, California, and Bellingham, Washington . . . flitting back and forth between the two. I went from fifth to tenth grade in Mendocino; I sort of consider that where I grew up. I haven't been there since, though.

PAT: *Did you go to college?*

ERIK: Never finished high school.

Sorry, kids, I probably shouldn't be saying this. It's just the way things worked out. I'm lucky in that I have the ability to do this. There are people who

"Each time you do something for a comic company



think they can draw comics, but I wouldn't recommend my route into it for them. It would be nice to have something to fall back on. Right now, all I have is my artistic ability; if I wasn't doing comics, I'd have to find something else in the artistic field.

PAT: *Since you don't have any formal training, how did you develop that talent? When did you discover it?*

ERIK: It's always been there, I think. I've been drawing forever, it seems. I started drawing comics in fourth grade, for myself. Didn't start getting paid for it 'till I was 21. I have a stack of comics in my closet that I drew in fourth and fifth grade.

PAT: *Is there an Erik Larsen discovery story?*

ERIK: The Erik Larsen origin story is a little convoluted.

When I was 19 years old, up in Bellingham, a couple of friends named **Al Harris** and **Kevin Keyes** and I printed up our own fanzine, GRAPHIC FANTASY. We sent out copies to be reviewed to COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE, which then had a few people doing that sort of thing: **Cat Yronwode,** for example. We sent them our stuff, it got reviewed, and people sent for it by mail-order.

One of them was **Gary Carlson** in Chicago, who was starting his own company. His character was Megaton, a black super-hero with a big yellow X across his chest. He hired me to do a character called Vanguard. I ended up completely writing, pencilling, inking, lettering, the whole schmeer. That was my start — kind of a small one.

Each time you do something, I've found, for a comic company, it gives you something you can show somebody else. After I worked for Gary for a while, I took photocopies of my work and sent it out everywhere. I got some work at Americomics and little bits here and there.

it gives you something you can show somebody else."

An INCREDIBLE HULK cover from idea to finished product.

I went to Chicago and ran into **Jim Shooter.** I'd sent him letters when I was trying to break in and he remembered my name. "So, you're a professional, now?" he said as he looked at my samples. I said, "Yeah — that's right!" He asked if I'd like to do something for MARVEL FANFARE. I didn't know what that meant: "How'd you like to do an inventory story that will sit on the shelf for three years, then show up inked rather poorly by **Vinnie Colletta** and embarrass you?" *(Laughter.)*

At the time, being young and naive, I said, "Gee, sure! Let's plot it tomorrow!" he was taken aback but said OK, so we did. That was Thor vs. the Hulk. It was a real deep plot and it ended up being an issue of THOR between **Simonson's** run and the **DeFalco/Frenz** run. **Stan Lee** ended up scripting it, so it was like, "Hey! I'm just subbing for **Jack Kirby** here!" *(Laughter.)* They spelled my name wrong.

Then I had the ultimate samples any kid could have: Thor vs. the Hulk — powerful stuff, throwing trains at each other. I met **Mark Evanier** at a convention and **Mike Gold** is the guy who eventually got me the DOOM PATROL work. **Mark Evanier** hired me on the spot to do DNAGENTS; I did the last five issues of that.

After that came the DC assignments.

PAT: *That was a fairly good "origin of Erik Larsen."*

ERIK: Whenever people show me their samples at conventions and ask, "How can I get into Marvel or DC?" the best answer I can give is "Get in through the back door. Do stuff for whoever will hire you; you'll find you might get ripped off sometimes" — I was. I sent some art off to a publisher who has kept it, never paid me for it, as far as I know it's never been published.

Someday, I *know,* I'll be at a conven-

"I enjoyed doing DOOM PATROL and I

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tion and find it printed somewhere, as the guy who has it realizes that I'm doing things with some recognition now and wants to cash in.

PAT: *From our quips about my being the one person buying DOOM PATROL during your stint on that title, you obviously have a sense of humor about criticism; but some of the criticism of your work on DOOM PATROL was pretty . . .*

ERIK: Harsh?

PAT: *Yeah, harsh, nasty, all those types of words. How do you as an artist — and as a person — react when someone gets that vitriolic?*

ERIK: Your feelings get hurt, you get sensitive, and maybe you take the praise with a grain of salt, too. "I remember when you thought I sucked," when somebody writes in and says, "You do the best 'whatever' ever . . ." You find yourself saying, "I don't know if I buy that." Or there's a line of kids wanting sketches at a convention. Somebody's pulling their legs or something — don't they realize I'm the same guy whose work they despised two years ago?

It hurt my feelings. I wish the person who was putting those letter pages together might have thought a little about my feelings on the matter. "Gee, maybe Erik doesn't want to see 'The art really sucks' every month." A lot of times, people respond to what they see others writing or saying and the whole thing feeds off itself. The reader sees the letters that say, 'The art is rotten,' and comes to the conclusion, 'I think he's rotten, too,' and sends in a letter. If that's the *kind* of letter they're printing, it'll get printed.

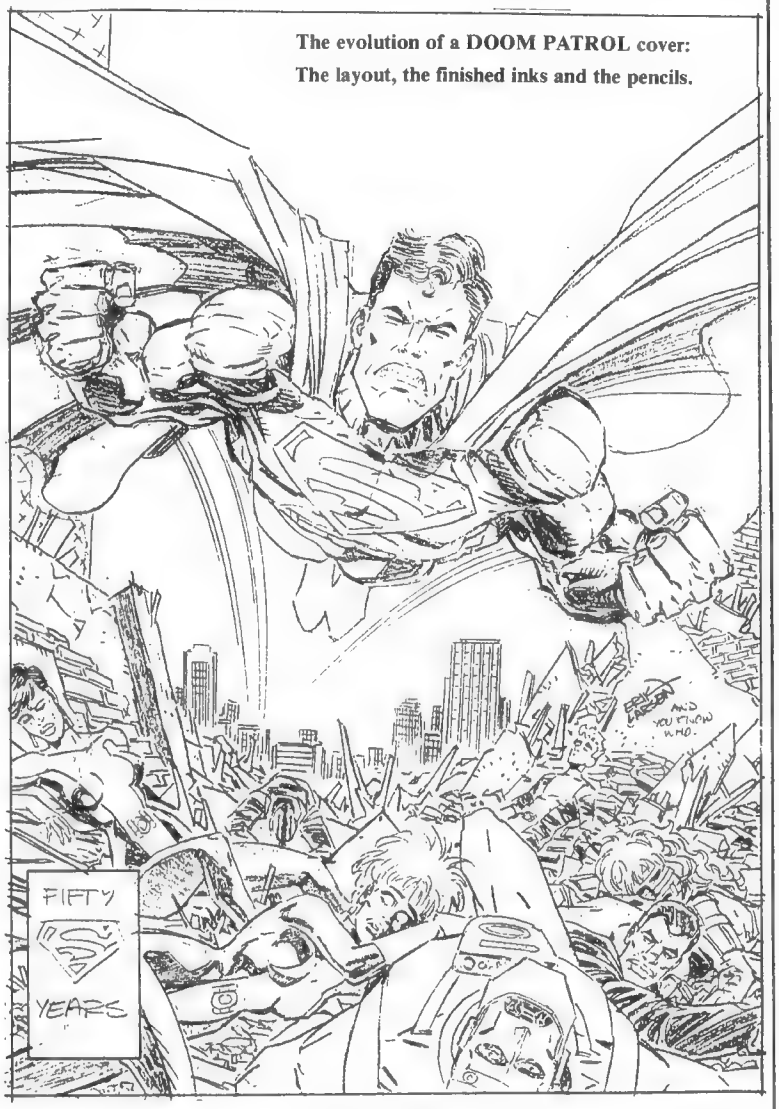
I'm sorry so many people didn't like my DOOM PATROL, but I enjoyed doing it and I still think some of it is my favorite work.

PAT: *What's the basic working method you've had with editors — and where do you find problems?*

ERIK: I've run into three or four different kinds of editors and different ways that they work with people.

One of the guys I've worked with **Terry Kavanaugh** — is very easy to work with. You'll talk over the story with him, give him a plot synopsis, it'll get approved from that point — this is when I'm writing — you just pretty much do what you want, and he'll run with it. He'll defend what you've done to whoever else may have quibbles with it. That's an easy

still think some of it is my favorite work."



The evolution of a DOOM PATROL cover: The layout, the finished inks and the pencils.

way of working; the only problem is that I think there have been places that I've messed up, where I thought some of my work wasn't clear, and — because Terry was giving me perhaps too much freedom — I wasn't able to make it as good a story as it could have been.

Some of the other editors — whom I won't name — seem to be more continuity-oriented and less exciting-story, good-story, interesting-story, involving-story oriented. They'll quibble on character bits: I might have a character reacting — in a particular situation — in a very visual way. That editor's reaction would be to have it redrawn in a more standard way, simply because they feel the character shouldn't react that way . . . when it could be covered in dialogue.

I think the average fan, when he's reading this stuff, doesn't have all the continuity in his head. Continuity can get to be a noose: When Spider-Man has fought a particular villain forty times or so, if you keep referring to those old stories again and again, it lessens the villain and the conflict. A villain who says, "Spider-Man — you've beaten me 40 times before. This time I'll get you!" That doesn't seem likely. If the writer ignores the previous encounters, or glosses over it, it can be exciting to the reader. He doesn't have to be notified that this character has fought the hero millions of times.

Frank Miller, when he was doing DAREDEVIL, glossed over a lot of Daredevil's history — didn't mention the inane things done between the stuff Frank liked and his own stories. I think that can work.

In one case, an editor outright lied to me. Those are the people I'm very unlikely to work with again. I was doing a fill-in on a book, the editor promised me the rate I had been getting on other work; I didn't really have time for the assignment, but he said he'd get someone else to do the breakdowns. "Is that going to cut into my rate?" I asked. And he promised it wouldn't. So I agreed. Meantime, I'm also asking about the inker — I wanted a good one. I suggested **Bob Wiacek.** The editor said, OK — he'd talk to Bob. Two-thirds of the way through the job, I asked again, and he said, "I'm pretty sure — 90 percent sure — that Bob will ink the book." I hung up and the phone rang. It was a completely

"To take a character with a homey feel and turn him

Pencils to "Marvel Comics On Sale Here" poster . . . by Larsen, later inked by Al Gordon.

different inker, saying, "I'm really enjoying inking this story."

PAT: *Oooooooo . . .*

ERIK: The editor had to know what was going on. The upshot was, I finished the book, regretting it. That editor — who I did a favor, essentially — now doesn't return my phone calls. When I got the royalty check — a long time later — there was $500 subtracted from it, the fee paid to the breakdown artist. Which the editor told me would not come out of my check.

PAT: *Do you think the continuity emphasis is a result of the fact that so many of the editors in comics today are fans who have joined the business? That they are wrapped up in what they remember reading?*

ERIK: Absolutely. They forget why they're fans of things. It's also true of a lot of writers. They remember being fans of a given character; and when they get the chance to write that character, their first inclination is to change his costume, his identity, give him a haircut — "What was it you loved about this character? His face? They all have the same face anyway — you could have come up with a new character!" It seems nonsensical to mess with anything that much. To take a character with a homey feel and turn him into an axe murderer — what happened here? You're not treating it with respect.

There's both — people who take a character and do the same things again and again, rehashing the same old stuff; and people who completely ignore the character's past and disavow and change everything.

PAT: *You said you feel the choice of inker is important. As a penciller, what do you look for in an inker?*

ERIK: A lot of people getting into the business — establishing a name for themselves — want an inker who follows what they do and makes it the best. I want to be able to open the book and say,

into an axe murderer — what happened here?"

"This is the best **Erik Larsen** art job ever." I don't want to see the best blankety-blank ink job ever. I want my best work to stand out, to take what's me and make it the best. When I'm looking for an inker, I want an **Al Gordon** or a **Terry Austin** or a **Bob Wiacek** as an inker — someone who gives me what's me . . .

PAT: *Yet everyone of those people has a distinctive style that is obviously theirs . . .*

ERIK: But there are many inkers who, when they're done with the art, you can't tell who the penciller was. I think **Nestor Redondo** is a great artist and **Rudy Nebres** is a great artist, but I would never ask for them as an inker. All I could say when they were done is, "This is a great looking job — who pencilled it?" But — especially when I'm trying to establish myself in the industry — I'm not doing myself any good to be buried under those inks — even though I think they're good. They might as well be inking people who are just trying to collect a pay check and don't care what it looks like.

PAT: *What drew you to accept the Spider-Man assignment?*

ERIK: I was out of work. *(Laughter.)* Let me tell you a story. I was doing THE PUNISHER and I hated it. **Mike Baron** was batting these things out and I thought they were kind of dopey stories. I know Mike can do some decent work — but these weren't them. I thought they were silly. The Punisher would have convenient stuff appear in his hands, because Mike forgot to set it up.

PAT: *Sort of like Bugs Bunny reaching behind his back and finding the mallet, right?*

ERIK: Right. There was different stuff that Mike didn't seem to be thinking about. He had the Punisher carrying a raccoon inside his coat for two hours. C'mon! You can't carry a raccoon inside your coat for two minutes, much less two hours.

"Tarantula always looked cool but was kind of

There was all this gun reference, too. That's not the stuff I like to draw. I like to draw people, guys walking on the street, talking to each other — or big bruisers kicking the crap out of each other. That's the type of stuff I like to draw.

Each issue was getting a tiny bit further behind — even though **Carl Potts's** schedules are way ahead of everybody else's. He had me doing the fifth issue when the first hadn't even come out. That was unheard of with any other editor. He was giving me a little grief about being late, so I said I gotta get out of here.

The reason I got to that point was that I wanted to write. One of my favorite comic-book characters is Nova. I was corresponding with **Terry Kavanaugh** on MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS and I had submitted a plot for a five-part Nova

Pages 4 and 5, a double-page spread, from MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS with Powerhouse vs. X-Factor.

lame. I want to turn him into a major villain."

story. I got the go-ahead and said, "I always wanted to write, here's my favorite character, who needs the Punisher?" Even though it's a risk, I'm gonna do it. I stayed long enough to handle the double-size issue and then I was gone.

Meanwhile, Terry offered me some other work, which I turned down. But the Nova piece got pulled out from under me, because they put him in THE NEW WARRIORS and my ideas didn't correspond with what they wanted to do. I got paid for plotting and scripting the first three parts.

Then the Excalibur stuff came up and then **Jim Salicrup** needed somebody to do an issue of SPIDER-MAN because Todd had fallen way behind on the bi-weekly summer schedule. I guess Todd had recommended me. Jim looked at my samples, he offered me an issue, then another; he never told me Todd was leaving the book and I had the job if I wanted it. Meanwhile, I got offered some other things, like the regular EXCALIBUR book; I called Jim and asked, "Am I doing SPIDER-MAN?" and he finally said yes.

PAT: *Who's writing SPIDER-MAN with you now?*

ERIK: David Michelinie.

PAT: *How much input do you have on the book, beyond your pencils?*

ERIK: Until recently, none. David had his plots set before I came on. At this point, we're starting to work together a little more. He has a general idea of what he wants to do over the next four issues, say, "Peter Parker gives up the superpowers; what kind of villains should we have?" We just came up with an as-yet-unnamed group to challenge Spider-Man. We wanted to bring in the Tarantula, who I always thought looked cool but was kind of a lame villain. I want to see if we can up his powers and turn him into a major Spider-Man villain.

You wouldn't call it co-plotting, but I do offer suggestions, which David often uses.

PAT: *I like to ask artists about their working methods. When you get a plot from David for Spider-Man, how do you go about turning those words into pictures?*

ERIK: This isn't unique at all — I just draw it.

PAT: *Do you do breakdowns or layouts first?*

ERIK: No, I go right on the paper. I don't have the time or inclination to do the other. I'll read it, eyeball it and hope that when I get to the end of the plot, I'm on page 22.

It's tough. Dave has a tendency to put in a lot of dialogue that takes up a lot of space . . . but you could just stick two heads in a corner and have them say all that and chew through a lot of plot. Sometimes I get to page 15 and check the plot and find I'm at the end. Then you have to stretch some stuff out and maybe stick in a page between two others.

Other times, I find myself running out of pages. And you discover you have 12 panels of action to squeeze into two pages. You don't want the final pages to be stamp collections. The one time that

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doug sez:

"I'm getting better and better at the pacing."

happened and I called and begged for an extra page.

I'm getting better at the pacing.

PAT: *Do you pretty much pencil the whole thing in order?*

ERIK: I don't even skip around on the page. I do a light blue pencil sketch of the total page, rule the borders, then finish the pencils on panel 1, panel 2 . . . That way it's a lot faster. If I was to pick a head here, a head there, do all the fun stuff, it becomes real work to do the rest. "Oh, gee, I've got a day's worth of buildings to draw!" *(Laughter.)* "Horses, cars, all the stuff I can't draw!"

It's easy to write, "Draw **Jay Leno** and **Malcolm Forbes** in Harley-Davidsons talking to Spider-Man" — but then the artist discovers he doesn't have reference for any of that stuff. It's not like you can go out and buy "**Jay Leno** Magazine"!

Splash page from Spidey #338 with the Sinister Six.

"The people at the top of our industry in

And I didn't even know who **Malcolm Forbes** was!

PAT: *Let me wrap this up . . .*

ERIK: That's it? I didn't even get to spew any venom yet!

PAT: *Do you have any venom you want to spew?*

ERIK: No — not really. I wanted to talk a little about fan favorites. When we look back at the people who were good years ago — the people who stand out in the '40s: **Lou Fine, Jack Kirby** — they were the top of their craft. That's changed in the last 10 years. The people who are at the top of our industry in drawing ability are no longer the fan faves. They're not the guys fans really respect and care about.

Fans are more concerned with detail — "This guy's stuff is more detailed than this one. I like him because he does eyes a certain way . . ."

PAT: *I know what you're talking about. I remember quite a few years ago — and not to slander anyone — but I remember when Mike Grell was just breaking in, he got a lot of play; a lot of fans were saying, "I really like what he's doing." But I kept looking at it and saying, "Yeah, on the surface, it's slickly inked, he has some nice rendering details, but underneath I don't see any drawing." It was frequently sloppy, particularly in terms of anatomy and proportion. He's improved — I like his stuff a lot now.*

ERIK: Now you have guys in the business who are fourth and fifth generation artists. When **Neal Adams** was starting out he was already a second-generation artist. We don't realize that because the stuff he was looking at was not visible to the comic-book reader . . .

PAT: *Comic strips, advertising art and foreign comics . . .*

ERIK: From that, you go to early **Bill**

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Three ideas for a LEGION '89 cover.

drawing ability are no longer the fan faves."

Sienkiewicz to **Tom Grindberg** and there's others doing **Neal Adams — Mike Nasser, Rich Buckler . . .**

PAT: *Buckler seems to do whoever his editor asks for: Adams, Buscema, Kirby.*

ERIK: All on the same page. *(Laughter.)*

I think there's a lessening of the fan favorites.

PAT: *I've been following the comic-book field for . . .*

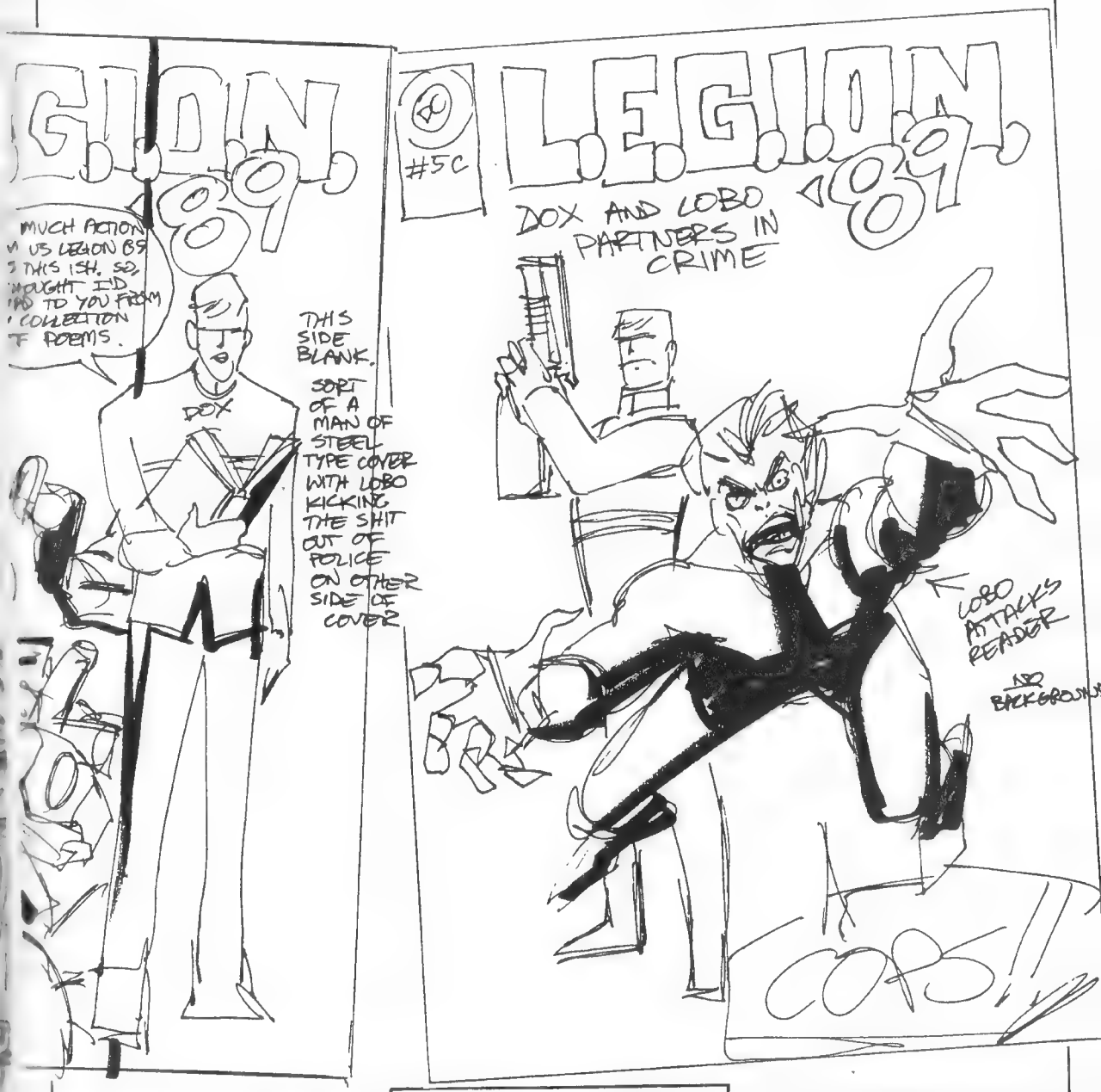
ERIK: Don't date yourself.

PAT: *. . . close to 25 years, and I look back and realize that, unfortunately, the fan favorites are not — at any stage — the journeyman workhorses, the ones who are consistently turning out good work. Not always spectacular or stunning, but consistently good, month after month, year after year. They aren't recognized for the things they do bring to a book: consistency, story-telling. Fans don't recognize those qualities.*

ERIK: Fans really don't know what they're talking about. They don't know anatomy, they don't understand it — when an artist puts every muscle in the human body into one arm or rearranges everything into the classic "sack-of-potatoes" back, they don't realize it. New artists come in and they're recognized for other traits. It doesn't allow the artists to get better — they see a fan favorite and determine to copy the surface gloss. There has to be a point where it's going to backfire.

PAT: *I interviewed John Byrne a few years ago and he remembered that when he started out he was doing a little John Buscema, a little Neal Adams; but now he realizes there are people coming into the business who are doing early John Byrne — but early Byrne wasn't anything. It was already second-hand or maybe third-hand.*

ERIK: It's happening so fast now — **Art**


L.E.G.I.O.N. '89
#5C
DOX AND LOBO PARTNERS IN CRIME
LOBO ATTACKS READER
COPS!!
L.E.G.I.O.N. '89
MUCH ACTION IN US LEGION 89 THIS ISH. SO, I THOUGHT I'D SEND TO YOU FROM MY COLLECTION OF POEMS.
DOX
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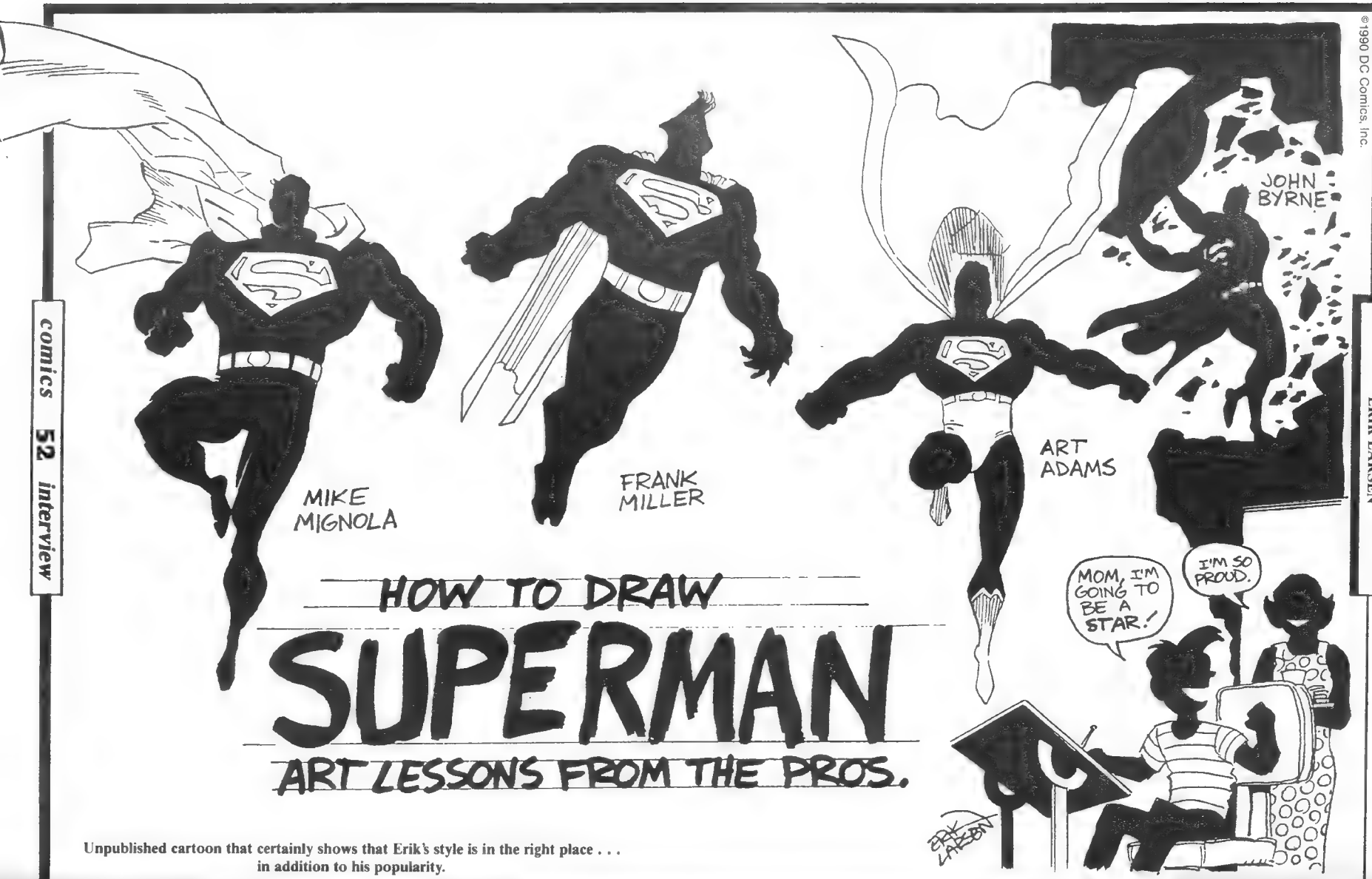
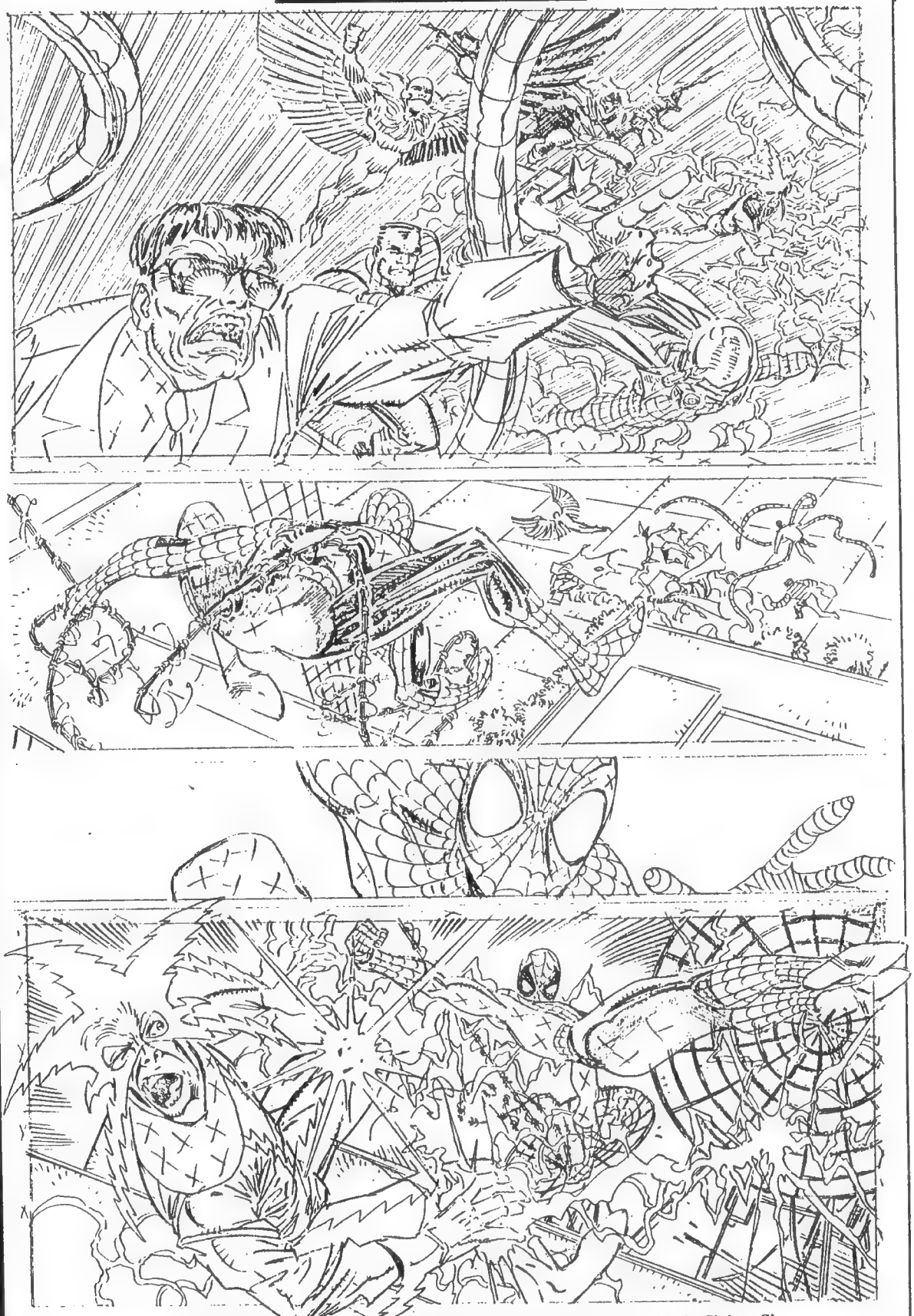
SORT OF A MAN OF STEEL TYPE COVER WITH LOBO KICKING THE SHIT OUT OF POLICE ON OTHER SIDE OF COVER



Unpublished cartoon that certainly shows that Erik's style is in the right place . . . in addition to his popularity.



Pencils from AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #338 with the Sinister Six.

"Nova is just Joe Schmoe; the incident of him

Adams is doing **Mike Golden** plus pieces of other guys, and Todd is doing Art plus pieces of other guys. I don't know what the end result will be.

I'd like to see some better drawing. We're all capable of it, but with tight deadlines you end up doing things a certain way all the time and that becomes the convenient way to solve the problem.

PAT: *You can see people who are obviously working their style out of someone else's — but who still have a real ability to draw. Andy Kubert is obviously influenced by his father's work, but underneath there's real drawing — real anatomy, real story-telling.*

It's one thing to emulate another person's style, but you'd better know how to draw first.

ERIK: I'm not necessarily saying that I'm a tremendous realist. There are people who amaze me: **Mike Golden, Kevin Nowlan, Rick Leonardi** — they think in three dimensions. I don't, so my stuff tends to look a little flat. They manage to construct science-fiction machines from three different angles, but when I construct something I can draw it from that first angle; if I have to turn it, sometimes I'm lost.

It doesn't have to be perfectly realistic for me to like it — but there's a quality of professionalism that has to be there.

PAT: *I agree. I want to see that they* know *the rules before they break them.*

ERIK: But there's no decent source for the rules. People get into the business without being told the rules, because they aren't written down anywhere. People give opinions who don't know how to draw either.

PAT: *If you had your choice of all the characters bring published or that have been published, and somebody said, "It's yours to do with as you will . . ."*

ERIK: Nova.

PAT: *Without blowing what you might someday be able to sell, what appeals to*

Panels 6-8 from Spidey #335 — these are the pencils as they were originally drawn . . .

getting the powers was a one-in-a-million shot."

you about Nova, and what's your angle on the character?

ERIK: He's a completely regular guy. Spider-Man was already smart, already doing something with his life, when he gets bitten by the spider. He could have come up with the web fluid without the powers. Don Blake and Steven Strange were already doctors. All these guys were not totally regular guys. Nova is Joe Schmoe; the incident of him getting the powers was a one-in-a-million shot.

I couldn't really picture myself becoming Spider-Man. I'm not as noble as Captain America, as smart as Bruce Banner. Nova is the only one who seems normal ahead of time. And he's practically a blank slate, so little has been done with him.

I'd put him in college, have him tell some friends about his secret — that's what I would do if I had super-powers. I'd have Spider-Man tell Flash in a second. If you're my best friend, I'm gonna trust you. That leads to all sorts of ideas: If I knew that my buddy was Nova, I'd ask, "Take me for a spin, drop me off in the Bahamas for a few days." They could become partners, with the non-powered one coming up with a strategy for Nova. It's sort of like having the FF with only one having super-powers. You'd have the camaraderie of a team, without actually having a team.

I could do this with almost anybody. If they said absolutely no with Nova, I could find somebody else to do it with. Spider-Man's kind of tough, 'cause he's got four books that have to be coordinated. You think, "I'd really like to do a great Green Goblin story," but **Gerry Conway's** over there making him into a super-hero. There's too many books to count on doing something great with him, because it's too hard to coordinate and you can't trust the other guy. It's heart-breaking in a way.

. . . And here's the finished inks with a re-drawn panel 7 by Tom Morgan.

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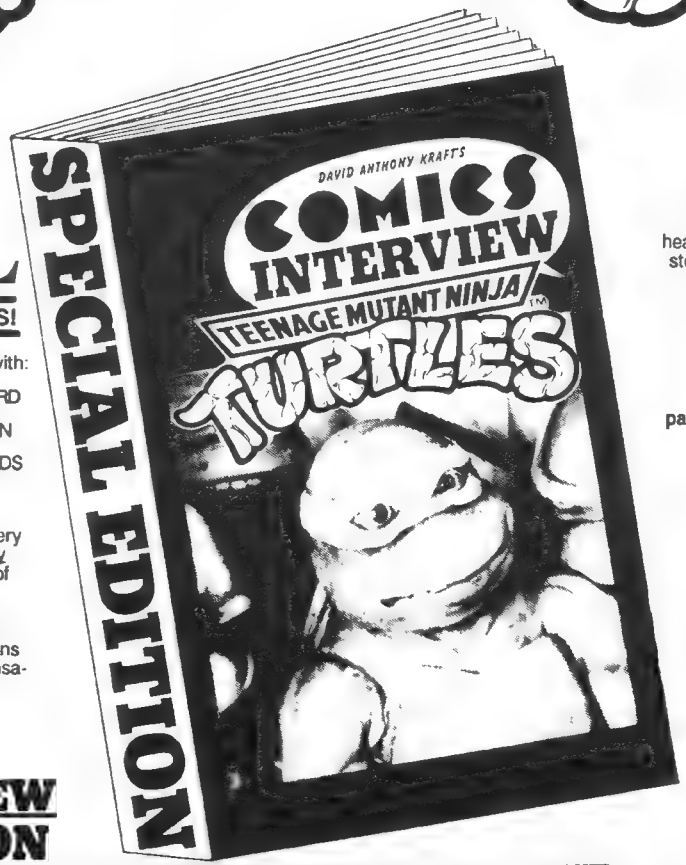

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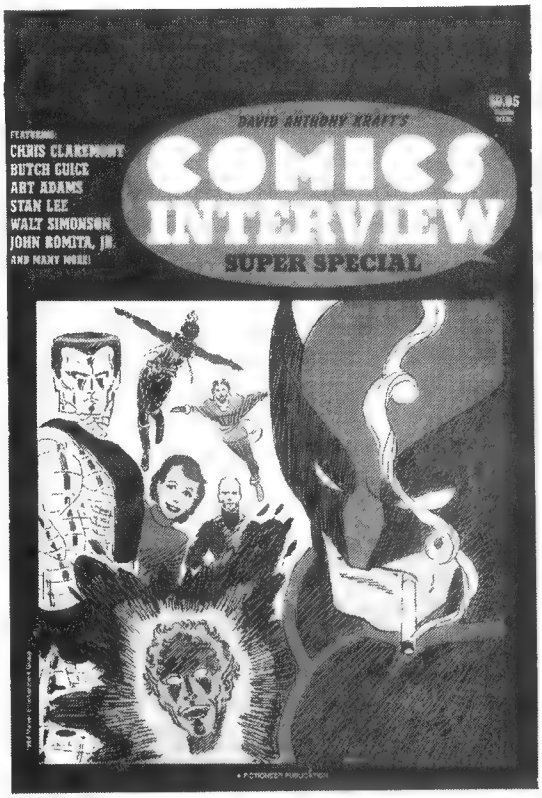

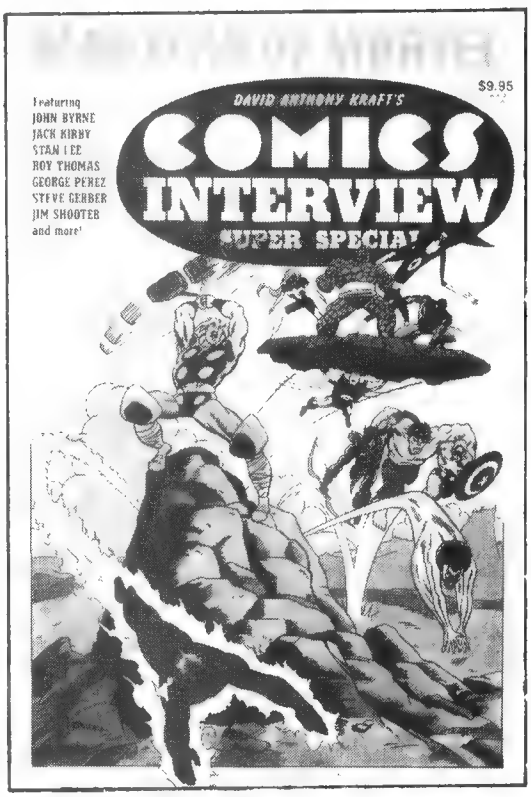

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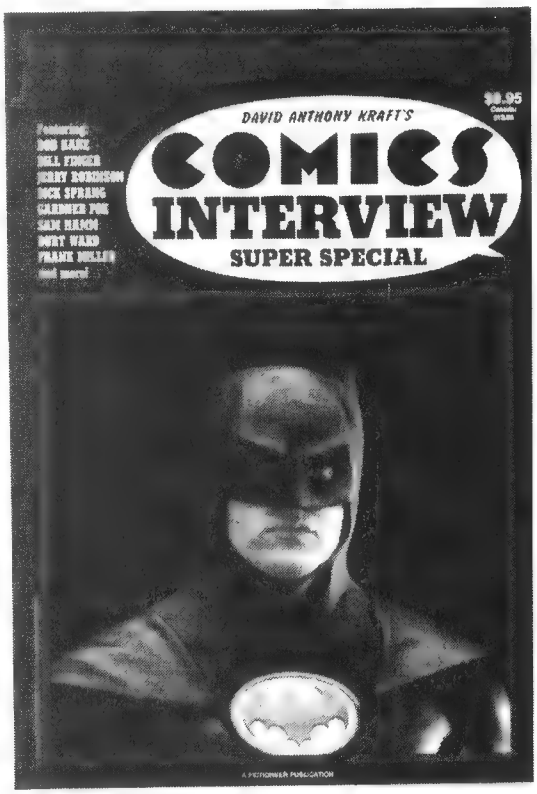

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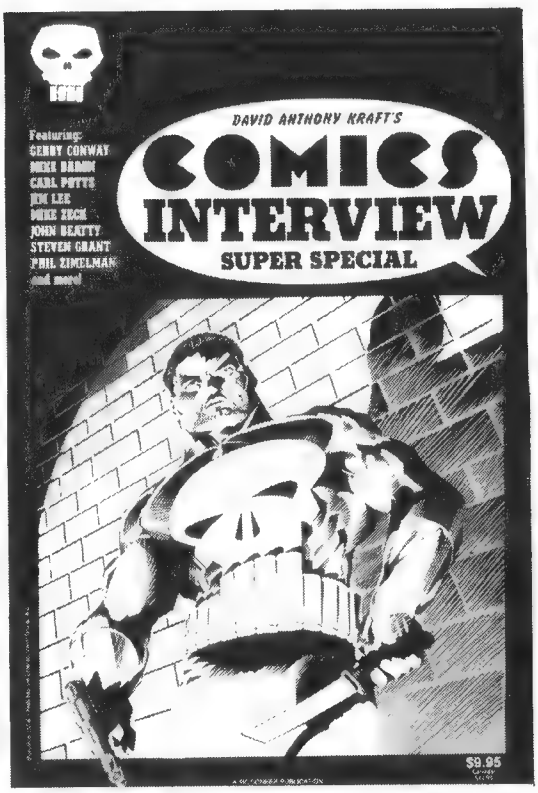

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"Storytelling is more important than the artwork."

JOHN PRENTICE

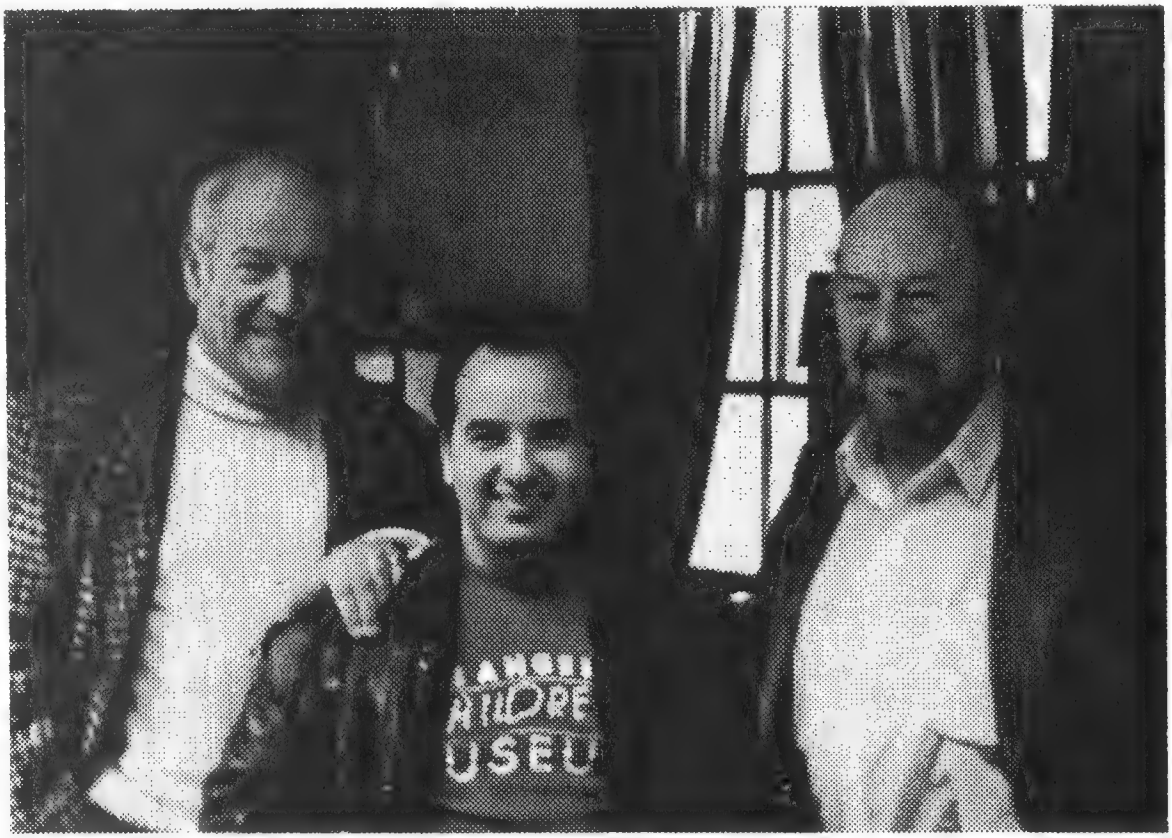
In 1986, while attending an NCS banquet, I wanted to meet the man who took over RIP KIRBY from Alex Raymond. As usual, my wife Beatrice and I had lunch with Stan Drake, and to our pleasure Johnny Prentice joined us. It was strange, at least to me, that the last man to see Alex Raymond alive — Stan survived the fatal car crash that took Alex from us — would be the one to introduce us to Raymond's successor. Over a pleasant, leisurely lunch I got to know John not only as a fine artist, but as a true gentleman. So, thank you Stan Drake, thank you John and Antonia Prentice, and now — here's Johnny!

PAUL POWER: *Johnny, when did you first start doing comic strips, and when did you first start drawing?*

JOHN PRENTICE: I have been drawing, Paul, I guess ever since I can remember. When I was a little kid I was always drawing. And I was encouraged, so I kept drawing. Finally I reached a point where I could read, saw all of the illustrations in magazines, and realized you could make a living drawing pictures. I was the happiest clown in the world! *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *When did you first make up your mind that you wanted to do it for a living? Were you very young?*

JOHN: I was still in grammar school when I knew I wanted to be a commercial artist, illustrator, cartoonist. And unfortunately, when I finished high school it was during the Depression, and



From left to right: Stan Drake, Paul Power, and John Prentice.

All artwork accompanying this interview is © 1989 King Features Syndicate, Inc., unless otherwise noted.

"I was at Pearl Harbor when the Japanese bombed."

POLICE CARS RACE TOWARD KIRBY'S APARTMENT..
THE BURGLAR CRASHED THROUGH THAT WINDOW UP THERE. I'M SURE I HIT HIM...
DO YOU KNOW HIM, SIR?
HE'S NICKNAMED "STAN, THE SCORER.' ONE OF THE SLICKEST JEWEL THIEVES IN THE WORLD, DESMOND...
SAVE YOUR STRENGTH, STAN...
IT... IT DOESN'T MATTER, RIP. I SHOULDN'T HAVE TRIED FOR ONE LAST BIG SCORE...
I WANT TO GIVE YOU SOMETHING BEFORE I GO. GOT IT IN THIS POCKET...
HE MUST BE IN ONE OF THESE APARTMENTS ALONG HERE...
YOU'VE TRIED... BE FRIEND. THIS'LL PAY YOU BACK, RIP...
WHAT'S THIS? SOMEBODY MAKING A JIGSAW PUZZLE OUT OF A COPY OF THE MONA LISA?
WAIT TILL YOU MEET THE PERSON WHO HAS THE OTHER PART!
HIGH OVER AN OCEAN, FAR AWAY..
IN A PRIVATE PLANE HEADING FOR NEW YORK..
A STRANGE KEY TO MY FUTURE--PART OF A COPY OF THE MONA LISA. DOES SHE SMILE BECAUSE SHE KNOWS?
WHAT DO I DO WITH THIS, STAN?
IN THE ENVELOPE... A NOTE... WILL TELL YOU...
OPEN UP! POLICE!
REMINGTON KIRBY

RIP KIRBY (no relation to Jack) by John Prentice and Fred Dickenson (on the script).

I didn't have enough money to go to art school. At that time there were no commercial art schools in Texas that were really that good, so I got the bright idea I'd join the Navy and save up my money to go to art school when I got out. And then I got caught in the War. *(Laughter.)* I enlisted in the Navy, and at that time the enlistment was for six years. So I was at Pearl Harbor when the Japanese bombed the place.

PAUL: *Oh, man.*

JOHN: When I got out of the Navy, I went to art school on the GI Bill of Rights. I went to Pittsburgh. I went to art school about ten months. Then I got a job with a publishing company, doing illustrations, and then they went bankrupt ten months later, so I moved to New York and started freelancing.

PAUL: *Did you follow Alex Raymond's*

"The syndicate wanted it to look like Raymond's work."

I'M AFRAID MISS HETTIE WILL BE VASTLY DISAPPOINTED, MR. KIRBY.
WORSE THAN THAT, UNDERWOOD. YOUR EMPLOYER OBVIOUSLY IS BEING SWINDLED. YOU'LL HAVE TO KEEP ME INFORMED OF THEIR MOVEMENTS IF WE ARE TO PROTECT HER.
AND AT THAT MOMENT NOT FAR AWAY:
YOU REALLY FOOLED HETTIE HILTON, DOC.
RIGHT, PANCAKE. AND NOW I'M GOING TO GET THE FIRST INSTALLMENT ON THAT MILLION!
9-28

Panels from one of Alex Raymond's last RIP KIRBY strips before his untimely death.

work as a kid?

JOHN: Yes, I loved FLASH GORDON. Every Sunday it was a big full page, just *beautiful!* And I became enamored of **Milton Caniff,** I followed all his stuff. **Raymond,** after the War he started drawing RIP KIRBY and I used to read that in the paper every day.

PAUL: *Did you collect it as well?*

JOHN: No, I never really was a collector; for some reason it never occurred to me to cut the thing out and file it away. I really didn't start doing that until I had been freelancing for quite some time and decided to build up my own morgue. When I started *doing* RIP KIRBY, there were a couple of people who had pasted up **Alex Raymond's** stuff, and they *gave* me their collections. You see, the syndicate wanted it to look so much like **Raymond's** work that nobody could tell the difference, because they anticipated losing papers when he was killed. They wanted to be able to say to the editors, "Look, there's a new guy been drawing it for two weeks, you don't even know the difference." It didn't lose any papers, in fact after I started drawing it we picked up about 30 papers.

PAUL: *Now, before you started doing the strip, you were doing all sorts of things, illustrations and comic books. What year was it when you first started doing comic books and such? Was that an accident?*

JOHN: Yeah, it really was an accident. I was looking for work, I was doing some illustration, and it never even *occurred* to me to try the comic books. For some reason I just didn't think about it. Then some fellow sent me up to a comic book publisher and they gave me my first script. It was funny, the first story I did was a romance story, and I took it in and the art director seemed very pleased with it. The next time I saw him he gave me another script and said, "Look, don't draw so many *heads.*" I had done practically the whole story in *heads! (Laughter.)* So, I went out and I bought a bunch of comic books and started seeing

From 1960, Alden McWilliams assisted John Prentice on this episode of Raymond's RIP KIRBY.

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NO! I HAVE WAITED TOO LONG TO BE CHEATED OF EVERYTHING NOW. GO, DELIVER YOUR MESSAGE...
HOW UTTERLY PEACEFUL THE NIGHT IS!
I HOPE IT'S AS CALM AS IT LOOKS...
I'M IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE, BUT THAT'S ALL THE STARS TELL ME.
JOHN PRENTICE 10-6

"When I came to New York, I actually was just

END PAGE ONE. THAT IS ALL.
TOMORROW NIGHT YOU WILL MEMORIZE PAGE TWO AND REPORT. GO BACK TO BED.
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Above: Another assistant to John — Al Williamson, circa 1967. Below: From five years earlier, Al Williamson provided the pencils & inks, again (the only difference: John inked the faces).

how the guys laid them out, how they broke down the story. That's the way I started with comics.

PAUL: *What I would like to know about is how you came to work with Simon & Kirby. I forget what the publisher's name was —*

JOHN: Was it **Gleason?** I don't even remember. I had no connection with the publisher because **Simon & Kirby** packaged the books, the whole thing, and so I never even met anybody. **Joe Simon** used to live very near me on Long Island, so I would actually pick up the work at his house, the scripts, and then take the finished artwork back to his house.

PAUL: *When we first met you told me a story about the Bulls-Eye character, and I was wondering if you would mind repeating that.*

JOHN: Oh, yeah. Well, I was doing . . . I forget what books they had. They had a crime book that they were doing, packaging, and I think they had a romance book. I alternated, I did other stuff for them, and they were *always* looking for something that would stand out on the stands. I don't know how many comic books there were, but there were *hundreds,* they just *covered* the stands. So the idea was to have somebody see *your* cover. Well, I was talking to Joe one day and I said, "You know what would really attract the eyes? A bull's-eye!" You know, a bull's-eye would attract the eye every time. The next thing I knew, they had a character called Bulls-Eye, this dead shot frontiersman, and they incorporated a bull's-eye on the cover. So I worked on that, I pencilled and inked some of those. This was a magazine they came out with on their own, that they published themselves.

PAUL: *Did you work at a shop as such, or were you working at home?*

JOHN: When I came to New York, I actually was just walking the streets of New York City looking for work. I started getting a little more and a little more freelance, and some illustration along with the comic books, and I always worked at home. I never even *knew* another artist for about four or five years! It's funny now, because all of my friends are cartoonists and artists, but at that time I didn't know another artist. I didn't even have anybody to talk with about this stuff. *(Laughter.)* I'd just go in and pick up the work, take it back home and do it.

PAUL: *Well, how did you perceive doing*

walking the streets of the City looking for work."

comic books at that time? What did you really think about them?

JOHN: Well, it was *new* to me in the very beginning. I actually was thinking of making a career more along the lines of illustration. After I did my first story I realized I really knew nothing about the medium. I had to learn how it was broken down and how they told stories. Storytelling is more important even than the artwork. So, I bought comic books and *studied* them, that's the way I did it. I would see how each fellow broke down the story and told it, I learned from that.

PAUL: *At that stage, there's certain stuff that I've seen of yours which seemed Raymond-influenced even at that time.*

JOHN: Oh, yes. It was funny, I was very much influenced by him in doing comics, but in doing illustration I wasn't. I was more influenced by guys like **Albert Dorne** and **Noel Sickles**. My illustration style was completely different than my comic-book style.

PAUL: *How did you find Kirby to work with? Did you have much to do with him?*

JOHN: Jack Kirby? You know, I'm not sure, I always dealt with **Joe Simon.** I knew Jack, but Joe always gave me the scripts and I delivered the work to him. If I remember correctly, I think I was already working for two or three other comic-book publishers, and I don't know whether Joe called me or I called him, I just don't remember.

PAUL: *Did you ever work with Jack Kirby, ever ink any of his stuff?*

JOHN: I think one of those stories were his pencils that I inked. The rest of them, I don't know.

PAUL: *When did you first meet Stan Drake and Leonard Starr? You shared a studio with him in New York. When was that?*

"A man has just been killed, you don't

SOME SAY HE'S AN OUTLAW---SOME SAY HE'S A SCOUT---MAINLY HE'S A LIVING LEGEND! THERE AIN'T A MAN HE CAN'T OUTRIDE--OUT-SHOOT OR OUTFIGHT! WHEN YOU SEE HIM, MISTER, YOU'LL REALLY SEE SOMETHIN'!
MEANWHILE, PANHANDLE PETE LEADS HIS HORSE INTO THE SHELTER OF THE WOODS---WHERE BOTH OF THEM UNDERGO A SURPRISING CHANGE.
THAT OLD TIMER SURE WOULD GET A JOLT IF HE COULD SEE US NOW, EH, PAL?

Above and Below: Jack Kirby inked by John (BULLSEYE).

JOHN: Well, Leonard and I — I was working for an industrial publisher on an industrial comic book about the 50th anniversary of powered flight; a lot of big airlines bought them. This publisher hired me to do this booklet, and I did half of it. **Leonard Starr** did half of it. That's really how we got to know one another. I had maybe met him at a party once before. And we became friends. We were going through a divorce about the same time, and we both were working for DC, too.

PAUL: *MY GREATEST ADVENTURE and all of that sort of stuff.*

JOHN: Yes, I did stories and covers on that kind of thing. And we both lived on Long Island. We were both going through a divorce, so we moved into New York and shared an apartment together. We had a *huge* apartment with no furniture in it, but a lot of telephones! *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *What year was this?*

JOHN: That was about '55 or '56. We've been friends all of these years. Now he had a studio right down the hall from me. We both lived in Manhattan after we both got married again. Then I moved to Westport, and within two years he moved to Westport.

PAUL: *When the tragic accident took Alex Raymond, Stan was in that, too —*

JOHN: That's right.

PAUL: *Did you know Stan at that point?*

JOHN: Yeah, I knew Stan. I didn't know him well. We had a mutual friend, **Tex Blaisdell,** who was doing backgrounds for Stan at that time. Stan invited Tex and I to play golf with him once, that was the first time I ever spent any time with him. Later, when I started doing RIP KIRBY, and he was doing JULIET JONES, we would meet at the King Features dinners and that kind of thing. So, we were always sort of casual friends, and we played golf together once in awhile.

PAUL: *Did you know Alex Raymond?*

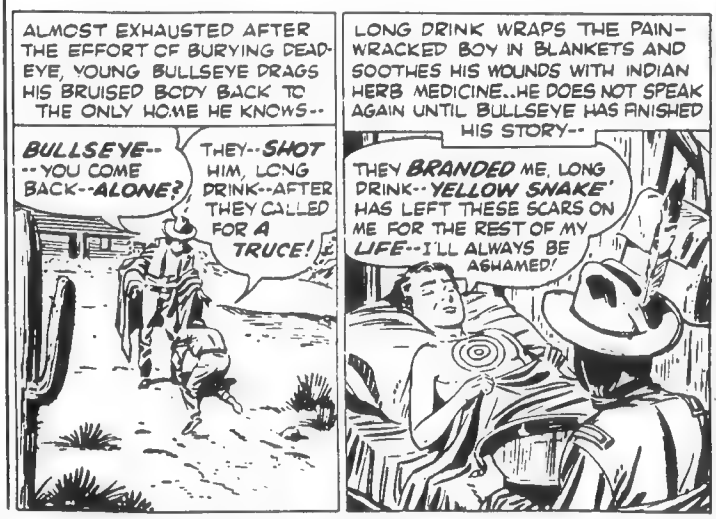
JOHN: No.

PAUL: *It's funny, I kind of assumed that you may have ran into Raymond, because of all of the other cartoonists that knew him.*

JOHN: No, I never met **Raymond.** In fact I didn't know too many cartoonists or artists at that time. I knew **Tex Blaisdell,** whom I met because he was art director for Hillman Publications at the time, and I did work for them. Then he went out on his own with some other publishing company, they started up a couple of books, and I did work for them.

PAUL: *When the accident happened, how did you get the assignment on RIP KIRBY?*

JOHN: Well, that was a funny thing. **Tex Blaisdell,** who was still doing backgrounds for Stan at that time, was here in Connecticut when it happened. That night he called me at home — was in the apartment in New York — and told me about it. What a tragedy it was. And he said, "I happen to know that he was very close on deadline and King Features is going to be looking for somebody in a hurry. You are the logical guy to do it. I


ALMOST EXHAUSTED AFTER THE EFFORT OF BURYING DEAD-EYE, YOUNG BULLSEYE DRAGS HIS BRUISED BODY BACK TO THE ONLY HOME HE KNOWS--
BULLSEYE-- --YOU COME BACK--ALONE?
THEY--SHOT HIM, LONG DRINK--AFTER THEY CALLED FOR A TRUCE!
LONG DRINK WRAPS THE PAIN-WRACKED BOY IN BLANKETS AND SOOTHES HIS WOUNDS WITH INDIAN HERB MEDICINE..HE DOES NOT SPEAK AGAIN UNTIL BULLSEYE HAS FINISHED HIS STORY--
THEY BRANDED ME, LONG DRINK--YELLOW SNAKE' HAS LEFT THESE SCARS ON ME FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE--I'LL ALWAYS BE ASHAMED!

call up the syndicate trying to get his job!"

think you ought to get in touch with them." So, the next morning I came into my studio where Leonard and I worked, and I was trying to figure out how to get in touch with the syndicate, because that's a very tricky thing. A man has just been killed, you don't call up the syndicate trying to get his job! I didn't really know how to handle it.

I called a friend of **Milton Caniff's**, and asked him if he would ask Milton to give me some advice about how to handle it. Milt called me back and he said to write them a letter. Well, I knew there was no time for a letter because **Alex Raymond** was too close on deadline. About that time Leonard came into the studio and said, "Gee, did you hear the terrible news about **Alex Raymond?**" So we talked a little while, and I told him about what Tex had said. He said, "Are you going to get in touch with King Features?" I said, "You know, I don't know how to handle it." Leonard had just met **Sylvan Beck** a short time before himself, the editor of King Features, to show him a strip he was trying to get syndicated. So he called Sylvan up and recommended me for the job. It was so funny, because he gave Sylvan my phone number and ten minutes later Sylvan called me up after I had sat there and listened to the whole conversation between him and Leonard! *(Laughter.)*

So, **Sylvan Beck** asked me to come down and bring samples of my work. I had a lot of comic-book stuff, and I had a lot of full-color illustrations, and he told me to go home and do a sample RIP KIRBY page and come as close to **Alex Raymond's** style as possible. Of course there was a contest — I don't know how many other artists were doing the same thing at the same time.

Leonard Starr & John pose for Dan Barry's Flash Gordon — 1951.

PAUL: *I heard that Jack Kirby tried out, which really blew my mind.*

JOHN: Maybe he figured he could switch his style. But anyway, I did two daily pages but I only showed Sylvan the best one — and I did a couple of little extra drawings of Desmond. Sylvan said, "Listen, this is not up to me, there are other people that have to make the decision too, but if it were up to me, you would have it right now."

PAUL: *How long did it take them to make the decision?*

JOHN: It was around a week, and **Raymond** was very close on deadline. When I started doing the strip I was only fifteen days ahead of publication. I had to do the first week in five days.

But, I waited several days and hadn't heard anything, and then my agent called me. He had a *lot* of work, several thousand dollars worth of illustration, and I had to say to him, "Listen, I don't know whether to take it or not. If I take it and then the strip comes through, I won't be able to do it. But if I'm not going to get the strip, I don't want to turn down the work." So I called Sylvan and I told him the situation, that I had to make a decision one way or the other. He said he would call me back in five minutes, and five minutes later he called me back and said, "You've got the strip, come down and pick up the script and start right away."

There was one funny little aside to this — at first it was on a trial basis. After two or three weeks Sylvan said, "Listen, you can start signing it now, we'll draw up the contract." And I said, "Listen, I don't *want* to sign it yet because I'm going through a divorce! If my wife finds out I'm drawing RIP KIRBY, she's going to want more alimony!" *(Laughter.)* So I didn't sign it until all of that was over.

PAUL: *With your style prior to working on the strip, you seemed to be the logical one to follow Alex Raymond. You drew in a Raymond style anyway. Did you . . .*

JOHN: Was that deliberate?

PAUL: *Yes.*

JOHN: Well, I didn't just sit down and intentionally say, "I'm going to draw this style." I had never done comics before, and I admired his work so much, had just *studied* his work so much, that it just

YOUR WOUND'S EASY TO HIDE--ALL YOU DO IS WEAR SHIRT! YELLOW SNAKE'S SCARS NOT SO EASILY HIDDEN. HE MUST WEAR HIS EVIL BEFORE ALL EYES! IT IS YELLOW SNAKE WHO SHOULD WEEP WITH SHAME!
THROUGHOUT THE WEST, BULLSEYE BECOMES A FEARFUL LEGEND, TALKED ABOUT BY MEN BUT RARELY SEEN... BUT PANHANDLE PETE IS A FAMILIAR SIGHT IN MANY TOWNS WHERE HE APPEARS FROM TIME TO TIME, TO HAWK HIS POTS AND PANS.
PAN HANDLE PETE

"My only concern was doing the first week in five days."

DARTH VADER sweeps through the disabled Rebel ship... to confront its CAPTAIN!
W-WE'RE ON... A DIPLOMATIC MISSION!
LIAR! WHERE ARE THE INFORMATION TAPES WE SEEK?
THIS VESSEL BEARS THE CREST OF ALDERAAN! IS ANY OF THE ROYAL FAMILY ABOARD?
SPEAK, BLAST YOU!
The officer REFUSES... at the price of his LIFE!
TEAR THIS SHIP APART UNTIL YOU HAVE THOSE PLANS! TAKE ANY PASSENGERS ALIVE... FOR ME TO DEAL WITH!

Many years after his work on Flash, Al Williamson took over STAR WARS.

began to happen.

PAUL: *That's what seemed odd to me, that you drew in such a* close *style to him. I thought you may have been an assistant or something, or you may have known him before.*

JOHN: No, I just liked the way he drew. At that time it was a modern style, and I think it's still kind of modern.

PAUL: *Oh, it is, yeah. Very cinematic, too.*

JOHN: I was very influenced by him. Since I started drawing RIP KIRBY, I've found the guys *he* was influenced by. **Raymond** was very much influenced by **Matt Clark,** an illustrator who did a lot of stuff for THE POST and COLLIERS and stuff at that time. Where you see a lot of it is in FLASH GORDON. **Clark** had a way of drawing a male figure with the neck thrust forward, and you'll see that in FLASH GORDON. You'll even see the same kind of haircuts. If you see **Matt Clark,** you'll see how **Raymond** was influenced by him.

PAUL: *I'll have to look for some of Clark's stuff. Did you ever want to draw FLASH GORDON?*

JOHN: No, I never even thought about it. Somebody else was drawing it when I started doing RIP KIRBY, I think **Mac Raboy.** When **Raymond** came back after the War, he wanted to pick up FLASH GORDON again but they already had somebody else drawing it. So they asked him to start a new strip, **Ward Greene** at King Features told him that. From what I understand, **Raymond** wasn't too keen on the idea. He thought they were trying to slough him off. But they made it very enticing to him, said they would give him ownership and the whole thing. So they came up with RIP KIRBY.

PAUL: *When you started doing the strip . . . what was the story called? There was a con artist with some sarsaparilla serum —*

JOHN: Yeah, he had some kind of a youth potion and he was going to con a very wealthy older woman, make her think he could make her look young again. But when Kirby runs a chemical test on it, it turns out to be sarsaparilla. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *That was a good story. Did you feel a lot of pressure when you took over the strip?*

JOHN: No, not really, it was very easy for me. A lot of people ask me that, I didn't feel any pressure at all. My only concern was doing the first week in five days, because it was all new to me. And I did, I did the first week in five days, and I did the second week in five days, and that way I picked up two days.

PAUL: *When you took over RIP KIRBY, did you do any sort of research on Raymond, the man or his work? Did you do any research on how he went about doing his job, or how he saw the medium?*

JOHN: I only knew the paper and the tools he used. **Tex Blaisdell** knew him, and he knew the pen he used. The paper, sometimes he would change, but I knew what he had used. That was all I knew. I had a lot of his originals, I could look and see what he used. They gave me a whole stack of them.

PAUL: *Still got them?*

JOHN: Yes! *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *He would change, you can see that in his work, following the progression. I've noticed that in yours, too. Sometimes you switch techniques.*

JOHN: Yeah. Sometimes you just get a feeling that you have to break the monotony and do stuff in some kind of different way. I, looking through his originals, now and then — this wasn't the way he usually worked — but now and then he'd use almost just a wire line and solid blacks. A very decorated style. Most of the time he used a pen and a

An example of Leonard Starr's work on the LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE revival, circa 1980.

"Leonard Starr can turn into the meanest looking guy you ever saw."

YOUR FATHER AND I SERVED IN THE SAME REGIMENT... BEFORE THE BATTLE OF WATERLOO, MANY OF US MADE WILLS...
AH, I SEE! AND KNOWING YOU AS A JUDGE OF HORSEFLESH, PAPA FELT YOU WOULD MAKE A SUITABLE GUARDIAN FOR ME!
BUT NO MATTER...
JUST TELL ME, PLEASE, WHY YOU HAVE BEHAVED SO ABOMINABLY --IGNORING MY LETTERS-- LEAVING ME TO THE MERCY OF YOUR WRETCHED LAWYER!
TO BE HONEST-- OTHER DUTIES BECAME SO PRESSING WHEN I INHERITED THE TITLE THAT I QUITE FORGOT YOUR EXISTENCE!
12-2
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Gray Morrow, another of John's assistants, went on to illustrate BARBARA CARTLAND'S ROMANCES.

brush both. He used to use a pen on light lines and shading and stuff like that, and he'd use a brush for wrinkles and hair and the heavy side of the face, the shadowy side. And then sometimes he'd just use a brush for the whole thing, the line would be thickened up everywhere. But he'd use a brush with a very decorative line, an interesting modern line. I used to use the pen for the light lines because I was always so afraid of the reproduction. You know, if you make a light line with a brush, you can make it as fine as a pen line, but it breaks down in reproduction.

PAUL: *You used a lot of brush on your comic-book work.*

JOHN: Yeah. I used about 20 percent pen, 80 percent brush.

PAUL: *Back to the question on Raymond, you didn't do research into the man?*

JOHN: No. I guess I never felt any need to know what kind of a human being he was, just to copy his style on the drawings. I sort of feel as though I knew sort of about him, because I knew people who knew him, heard them talking about him. I really don't know what kind of personality he had. I know he was liked and . . .

PAUL: *He seemed to have been a performer in some sense.*

JOHN: Yeah.

PAUL: *Maybe much like Stan Drake.*

JOHN: Who knows? I never knew him. He was a nice looking guy.

PAUL: *I know that he felt that what he was doing was very cinematic.*

JOHN: Yes. Well, not too long after he started RIP KIRBY, some television producer or something wanted to have a television series of RIP KIRBY. They couldn't reach an agreement because **Raymond** wanted control of the whole thing, he wanted total say. He didn't want to be the producer or anything, but he wanted to say that they couldn't do this or that, you know. They wouldn't give it to him.

PAUL: *I often think of cartoonists, those who do the adventure strips, as directors. Have you ever thought about that? Do you ever see yourself as an actor as such?*

JOHN: Well . . . I never really thought of it, but I guess we all do a lot of acting, cartoonists or illustrators. In fact if you've got a dramatic situation and you want to use somebody as a model, a cartoonist or an illustrator is very good because they lose all their inhibitions. They know what you want from the character. If it's an aggressive and mean guy, they'll be aggressive and mean. If you use a friend, they'll be very stiff, and they don't understand what you want. But if you've *drawn* enough of that stuff yourself, you know what the other guy wants. I used to — I guess everybody does this — now and then when I'd get stuck for a situation, I'd pose for a character in the mirror and have my

MEANWHILE...
... I DON'T KNOW WHICH IS MORE TIRING ... WALKING OR SHIVERING ... I JUST HOPE IT ISN'T TOO COLD T' SLEEP!
...GOOD THING WINIFRED MADE ME TAKE A SWEATER ...

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Best Wishes — LEONARD STARR

"The reader has to be advised because if he missed the day

daughter or somebody shoot the picture. And a guy like Leonard, if you use him for a villain, he can turn into the meanest looking guy you ever saw right before your eyes. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *And it's fun because if you look carefully through the strip, you can see Leonard in there. But he still changes enough that it's different characters.*

JOHN: He's posed for me a lot, and I've posed for him a lot.

PAUL: *Has he ever assisted you in any way on RIP KIRBY?*

JOHN: No, the only thing he ever did for me was when I got the strip I also had a DC story on the board — and I wanted to get right onto RIP KIRBY — so he did that. I just turned the whole thing over to him and he did it and got paid for it.

PAUL: *How much had you done?*

JOHN: I hadn't started on it.

PAUL: *Well, that was good of him, to take the whole job.*

JOHN: Oh, I've got a funny story for you. At the time Leonard and I were sharing a studio in New York and we were both using **Tex Blaisdell** to do backgrounds and stuff. We were both working for DC. I found out dealing with **Murray Boltinoff** that if you took him in complete pencils, he would *always* find something he'd want you to change. But if I took him in very rough breakdowns, he couldn't see what was going on. *(Laughter.)* And he wouldn't admit it, so he wouldn't make any changes. So that's what I'd do, I'd give him very rough breakdowns. *(Laughter.)* So, it finally got to the point where I would just give it to Tex and Tex would just lay it out with stick figures and stuff, and I'd just take that in.

I had been doing that for so long that one time Tex brought in a job to me that he had laid out and I didn't even *look* at it, I just took it in to DC and gave it to Murray. He opened it up and it was all laid out in stick figures, but in the borders he had these nude couples doing what you shouldn't do! *(Laughter.)* And **Murray Boltinoff,** it was precious, he said, "What the hell is this?" *(Laughter.)* And he turns over the page and there on the board is the next page with three or four couples going at it again, and he says, "What is it with you, do you think this is *funny?" (Laughter.)* He says, "You and **Leonard Starr** . . ." — **Tex Blaisdell** had done the same thing to Leonard! *(Laughter.)* And I couldn't say I didn't do it, because it was supposed to be my work! *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *Oh, man. You find out who has a sense of humor when you do those things.*

JOHN: Yeah. You find out very fast. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *So . . . when RIP KIRBY first started with Alex Raymond, he was*

One of John's favorite artist, Milton Caniff. Illustration is from the never made TERRY AND THE PIRATES motion picture.

before, he won't know what's going on for some time."

indeed the writer as well, right?

JOHN: From what I understand, from **Sylvan Beck, Raymond** started writing it. Then . . . I don't know. I guess the decision was made by the top brass at King Features, maybe **Ward Greene** — they decided they should get him a writer, so they brought **Fred Dickensen** in, who was an old newspaperman and a very good writer. He covered the St. Valentine's Day Massacre in Chicago.

PAUL: *Wow!*

JOHN: And he's written for READER'S DIGEST and for a lot of the slicks and stuff, plus for THE MIRROR in New York. They would sit down with him once a week and teach him the comic-strip format. In the first place, you have to be concise, you don't have room for a heck of a lot of dialogue. Fred was very good at that, at paring down the dialogue. And the breakdown, you know, with the recap on the front in such a way that the reader is not really aware of it, and the cliff-hanger on the end.

PAUL: *Which is a very very tough form to learn.*

JOHN: It is, because you're recapping in the front panel, and yet you don't want to repeat what you did the day before, but still the reader has to be advised because if he missed the day before, he won't know what's going on. So, they got together for quite some time that way, until Fred doped it out. After that he would meet with **Raymond** once a week and they would discuss the next week's story.

PAUL: *Raymond still had a lot to say about the writing.*

JOHN: Oh, sure. They would get together and Fred would give him the idea of the next week, and if **Raymond** had any suggestions or any changes that he wanted, he'd tell Fred. That's the way they did it, they collaborated.

PAUL: *When did he first start writing it?*

JOHN: I'm not sure, Paul. I know **Raymond** wrote it in the beginning and then they brought Fred in, but I don't know how long **Raymond** wrote it.

PAUL: *Have you always enjoyed drawing the strip?*

JOHN: Yes, I have. I particularly like Desmond. I love his background. He is an Englishman, a reformed safe cracker, and now he's as honest as the day is long and a very proper gentleman.

PAUL: *Do you ever play with that fact and bring him back to his old roots?*

JOHN: Oh, sure. I've had him back in London where they were trying to find a missing girl, and he contacted his old underworld friends to help him. I had him in an old castle off the British Coast, on maybe one of the Channel Islands — it could be anyplace located over there. I had some English criminals in the story, that kind of thing.

PAUL: *Have you ever taken Kirby to*

"It was great for me because we got way ahead on the stuff."

IF YOU WOULD CARE TO SURRENDER YOUR HAT, GUNSEL, YOU MAY JOIN ME IN THE KITCHEN.
THIS IS A VALET? A DISGRACE TO THE PROFESSION!
OH, YES! MY HAT!
NEW ACQUAINTANCES ARE OFF TO A SLOW START.
I RECENTLY SAW YOUR FACTORIES DOING VERY WELL OVER MUCH OF EUROPE, MR. VON KRUMP.
INDEED! INDUSTRY IS NOT MY PROBLEM...
OUT THERE IN THAT CITY IS A YOUNG WOMAN WHO HAS ROBBED ME! I WANT YOU TO FIND HER!
JOHN PRENTICE 6-29
IT'S A LARGE CITY IN WHICH TO FIND A PARTICULAR YOUNG WOMAN, MR. VON KRUMP.
HERE IS A PHOTO OF HOLLY GLOWSTEP, THE THIEVING FEMALE I WISH APPREHENDED, MR. KIRBY.
GREAT SCOTT! IT'S MARY JANE SMITH, THE SINGING SCHOOL-TEACHER!
COUNTESS CARESSA! WHAT A PLEASANT SURPRISE!
HELLO, WIGGERS. SUCH A LOVELY DAY...
JOHN PRENTICE 6-30
I'M CERTAIN THIS IS THE YOUNG WOMAN ON THE PLANE WHO TOLD ME HER NAME WAS MARY JANE SMITH, MR. VON KRUMP.
SHE IS CAPABLE OF ANYTHING, MR. KIRBY...
SHE WAS INTRODUCED TO ME AS HOLLY GLOWSTEP. AND SHE STOLE MY MOST TREASURED POSSESSION!
LOVELY DAY, YES! AND MAY I SAY COUNTESS CARESSA IS A LOVELY NAME THAT GOES TRIPPINGLY ON THE TONGUE?
AH, WHAT'S IN A NAME, WIGGERS? REMEMBER THE ROSE!
JOHN PRENTICE 7-1

John Prentice on RIP KIRBY. "When I started doing the strip I was only fifteen days ahead of publication. I had to do the first week in five days."

Texas?

JOHN: No. I've had him out west but it could be anywhere. Well, **Fred Dickensen** was very big on fictitious places. If he would have them in a foreign country or a South Sea island or something, it would always be a fictitious place, he'd make up a name for it. We never did that with Europe, we had him in Venice or London, and of course he would be in New York. But if he went to a place out west somewhere, he'd have a fictitious town.

PAUL: *Do you know about any of the thinking that went into the original creation of the strip?*

JOHN: From what I hear — and most of this is just speculation — when they decided on a detective strip, they decided to make Rip Kirby just the opposite of what a detective of that period was.

PAUL: *Hard-boiled Mickey Spillane type.*

JOHN: Yeah, that's right. So, they had him wear glasses and they made him a longhair — he likes longhair music, classical music — and they called him a criminologist, and he's very genteel. They did that just to get away from the stereotype detective of that period.

PAUL: *Which I quite like because it lends more danger to the character. You had a feeling that maybe he would get his ass kicked, you know.*

JOHN: Yeah. Well, he *did* get his ass kicked many times. In fact I was reading some spy novel . . . by an Englishman, I forget his name —

PAUL: *Ludlum?*

JOHN: No, it was . . . it doesn't come to me now, a very well known author who wrote a lot of spy type things. **Dayton,** I think it was **Lynn Dayton.** Possibly it wasn't him. But, the hero had just been tortured, tied up, beat up, everything, and he'd gotten away and was at his girlfriend's apartment, and he said, "I feel like bloody Rip Kirby!" *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *How has KIRBY evolved, how has it changed, from Raymond's era to yours?*

"I would ink the heads and hit it up with blacks and stuff."

JOHN: Well, Rip Kirby is still the same basic character. His *looks* have changed simply because fashions and hairdos change. I give him different haircuts as time goes by, without being *too* extreme, and I've made his glasses a little bit thinner. Well, his features have changed too, actually. I noticed when **Raymond** drew him, sometimes he drew him with a slight hump in his nose, like a broken nose, and sometimes he drew him with a straight nose.

PAUL: *In the beginning he drew him as with the broken nose, like from 1946 through to '50, and then it changed.*

JOHN: Yeah, he started drawing him with a straight nose. When I started drawing him, I decided I liked the crooked nose better. I drew him with a crooked nose for a long time, but then I just got tired of it and I began to change his nose a little bit, made it sort of straight. I still waver back and forth, sometimes I draw with one nose, sometimes with the other. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *What about some of the assistants that you've had over the years?*

JOHN: Well, actually, the only two full-time assistants I had were **Al McWilliams,** who helped me in the beginning when I was trying to get ahead several weeks, around '57 and '58, and then after that **Al Williamson** worked with me full-time. I guess Al and I worked together for about six months before we went to Mexico — we all went down there and lived, were there for about a year-and-a-half. Then when we came back, it was a few months, so probably two-and-a-half to three years we were together.

PAUL: *I think it did him a lot of good, working together with you.*

JOHN: Well, he always said it did — and it certainly did *me* a lot of good. It was great for me because we got way ahead on the stuff. He's wonderful, he's a terrific guy to work with, very enthusiastic. He's got a lot of great ideas, he draws like a fool, and he's terrific. Then, after that, he went out freelancing on his own, and every now and then when I'd get in a jam or want to take a week off or something, he'd just do a week for me, just do the whole week. Then there were other fellows. **Gray Morrow** — this was years and years ago, this must have been in the '60s — Gray would do a week for me now and then. **Frank Baldwin** and **George Evans** have worked with me.

PAUL: *He's a terrific artist.*

JOHN: Yeah, he's great. Well, all of these guys are. That's the trouble, you can't get them anymore, they're all too busy with their own stuff. *(Laughter.)* Who else? There were probably a couple of more.

One of the many projects that Jack Kirby went on to co-create and draw was CAPTAIN AMERICA (above, original pencils).

PAUL: *So, when these assistants would work with you, how would that break down? Like, did you do the heads and —*

JOHN: What I did most of the time is I would ink the heads and go through and hit it up with blacks and stuff. With **Al Williamson,** I let him do the whole thing, the heads and the whole works. We worked together long enough that he could do it and even I'd have trouble telling the difference.

PAUL: *He must have been the perfect assistant for you, because he has the same love of Raymond as you seem to have.*

JOHN: Yes. When we went down to Mexico it was funny because he spoke fluent Spanish, but what a twelve-year-old would know. *(Laughter.)* He didn't know anything about banking or checks or anything like that. And I didn't learn too much Spanish either, because he and I were together all of the time, so he could speak and translate for me. **Howard Post** was there with us, too — we had a studio, the three of us — and **Howard Post** speaks fluent Spanish, too.

PAUL: *What's he doing now?*

JOHN: Oh, he had a syndicated strip for a long time, in fact that's still being reprinted in Europe — it's called THE

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"I wouldn't have minded drawing FLASH GORDON, but it's a

I'LL HIDE THE 'LIGHT OF LEIPZIG' HERE WHILE I MEET THE STAFF WIGGERS HAS HIRED.
'COUNTESS CARESSA' RELAXES HAPPILY.
BUT ANOTHER PLANE FROM EUROPE IS LANDING IN NEW YORK...
SEE TO THE BAGS, GUNSEL, SHE CAN'T BE TOO FAR AHEAD OF US!
YES, MR. VON KRUMP...
JOHN FRANCIS 6-26
IN A PLUSH HOTEL SUITE...
STEAL THE 'LIGHT OF LEIPZIG' FROM ME, WILL SHE, GUNSEL? I'LL FIND HER! I'LL HIRE THE BEST DETECTIVE IN NEW YORK TO TRACK HER DOWN!
YES, MR. VON KRUMP.
HMMM! HEAVENLY! JUST RIGHT FOR A SUNNY DAY IN A BEAUTIFUL WORLD!
NEXT AFTERNOON, WHILE A LADY BROWSES...
REMINGTON KIRBY
JOHN FRANCIS 6-27
ERIC VON KRUMP TO SEE MR. KIRBY!
PLEASE COME IN. HE IS EXPECTING YOU...
A NEW ARRIVAL FROM EUROPE PAYS A PROFESSIONAL CALL.
HELLO, MR. KIRBY. I TOOK THE LIBERTY OF BRINGING MY VALET, GUNSEL. HE GOES EVERYWHERE WITH ME...
PERFECTLY ALL RIGHT, MR. VON KRUMP...
GUNSEL AND DESMOND CAN BECOME ACQUAINTED WHILE WE DISCUSS YOUR CASE...
JOHN FRANCIS 6-29

John's RIP KIRBY from 1972.

DROPOUTS. He had two characters on a desert island, and it was a very funny strip. Then, of course, he finally began to run out of stories on that desert island, so he had to move them to a bigger island where he had cannibals and things, and bring in some more characters. He was director of animation for Paramount. He's a very good writer, he's written a lot of stuff.

PAUL: *Now, other people have worked with you, like Frank Bolle. When he did some work for you, I noticed that his style changed. I've watched the evolution of his style, and it's more in keeping with your style now.*

JOHN: Well, you know, when **Leonard Starr** started ON STAGE — he got ON STAGE the same week I got RIP KIRBY — Frank used to help Leonard on that. Frank worked for Leonard for a long time. And another guy named **Carl Anderson** did the backgrounds for Leonard. **Carl Anderson** did great caricatures, and I think he did a lot of children's book illustrations. But at the time he just worked full-time for Leonard, it was after that that he started freelancing.

PAUL: *Frank, when he worked with you, obviously he liked your style.*

JOHN: Well, he never really worked with me. What he did, he would just do a week every now and then for me. But he did work for Leonard for several years, way back. Then, I don't know, he's had two or three strips of his own.

PAUL: *Have you ever helped out any of the other cartoonists on their strips?*

JOHN: No, I never have. Well, before I started doing RIP KIRBY **Dan Barry** called me and asked me to do a week of FLASH GORDON.

PAUL: *Oh, did you do it?*

JOHN: No, I was too busy, I didn't have the time to do it.

PAUL: *That would have been interesting.*

JOHN: Yeah. I wouldn't have minded drawing FLASH GORDON, that type of thing. But that's all changed now, it's a whole different ball game now than when **Raymond** was doing it. I think FLASH GORDON would have made a great movie . . .

PAUL: *The one they did was too weird.*

JOHN: Yeah.

PAUL: *Have you ever seen your work in*

whole different ball game now than when Raymond was doing it."

terms of cinema?

JOHN: I've read through a lot of things. RIP KIRBY is *perfect* for a movie. If somebody would really dope the whole thing out so they could shoot it, I think it would work great.

PAUL: *Yeah, even the dialogue would still work.*

JOHN: Yeah.

PAUL: *The scripts on RIP KIRBY are very good, very realistic, and you guys have a lot of restrictions on that.*

JOHN: Yes. Of course you would have a lot more latitude in a movie.

PAUL: *But everything is all there already. Did Blaisdell ever help you on RIP KIRBY?*

JOHN: Yeah, he's helped me on KIRBY quite a few times.

PAUL: *Well, who . . . I would assume that the best assistant you've ever had would have been Al Williamson.*

JOHN: Yes.

PAUL: *For many reasons. I mean, I'm not condemning the other guys —*

JOHN: They're all good. Al had a style very close to mine anyway. He was a **Raymond** fan, and he drew about the same proportions. He had a different style than I was using on KIRBY, but the drawing was the same, the pencilling and stuff. It was just a matter of inking. Al at that time drew everybody in Levi Jeans. It was funny, he didn't know how to draw a suit with a crease in the pants. *(Laughter.)* He'd draw a guy in a suit, it would look like he had on Levi Jeans. But he actually worked out very well, he was very good, and we got along beautifully. It was fun!

PAUL: *Do you still see him every now and then?*

JOHN: No, he lives so damn far away, I don't see him very often. We talk on the phone every now and then.

PAUL: *What about with George Evans, what was he like?*

JOHN: George is a terrific guy, and a very bright, well informed, well read guy. He's fun. He's got a sense of humor. He and I never really worked together in the same studio. He would do a week for me now and then. Sometimes in the beginning he would come by and pick it up and we would talk about it, but then after that — he lived on the Island and I lived in Connecticut — I would just mail it to him with notations and notes and stuff. He's probably done . . . I don't know, several different weeks of KIRBY.

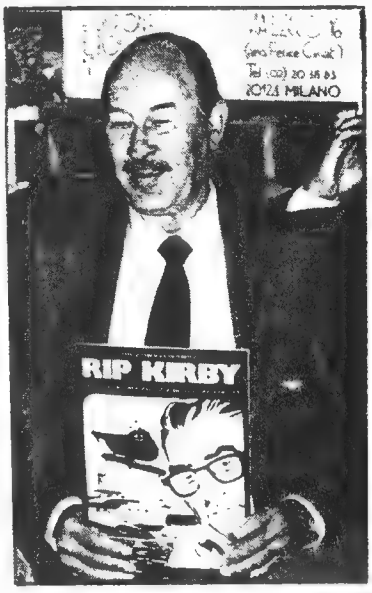
PAUL: *I've always admired his work. Did any of the stories have anything to do with aviation?*

JOHN: Yes. There was a story up in Alaska where we had Kirby going out into the wilderness and the only way to get there was by bush plane. We wanted to get a little bit of humor into the story, so I had this old guy named Amazon Andy — who was a funny character I used in a previous story in the Amazon jungle — Kirby is trying to rent this plane, and here this Amazon Andy is. He said he got tired of the jungle and everything and came up to Alaska to seek his fortune, and he had this *old* plane that looked like it might have engine problems or something, patches on it and all that. Kirby was concerned about the plane, but he says, "Oh, it's a very good plane. I bought it from a very honest used plane salesman." *(Laughter.)* George did a week of that. He *told* me the plane to use. *(Laughter.)* He got me a couple of pictures of it, and after I saw what it looked like, I looked through my files and I had two or three more pictures of it. So, he did a week with the plane.

PAUL: *What about Gray Morrow? How was he to work with?*

JOHN: Well, the same with Gray, he never worked in the studio with me. I would just give him a week and he'd take it home and do it. And that was years and years ago, he's been too busy for years and years.

PAUL: *Now — you don't have to name names — but has there ever been anybody that has done any work for you that just turned out to be a mistake? Has that ever happened?*



John Prentice, Lucca, Italy convention.

JOHN: Two or three times. Yeah, you have to erase and patch up and stuff. That's why I usually ink the heads. The heads, boy, if they go off on the heads it doesn't even look like the characters sometimes.

PAUL: *Who were the favorite recurring characters that you liked playing with?*

JOHN: Well, of course Desmond. That's where Fred used to get a lot of humor into the stuff, there was a lot of cute and funny stuff that he wrote. Of course, one of the all time favorite characters was the Mangler. **Raymond** created him, and I don't know how many times we've brought him back. When I first started drawing the strip, I would meet with Sylvan and Fred. They were talking about the Mangler and I said, "You know, the Mangler doesn't seem like a threat to me anymore. Kirby has bested

AGENT SECRETO CORRIGAN — with old pal, George Evans (& Archie Goodwin), 1983.

AGENTE SECRETO CORRIGAN
Williamson y Goodwin
"¡Vente con nosotros, Felipito—dice Mir—para que seas inmortal! ¡Para que te pasees por las estrellas!" ¡Qué oferta! Ya no tiene esperanzas con Lynn... ¿Por qué no aceptarla?
¿BIEN?
MIR, NO HAY PALABRAS CON QUE AGRADECERTE LA OFERTA
PERO NO IRÉ
PUEDO ENFRENTARME AL "PROBADOR" O A TRUA PERO LA PERSPECTIVA DE VIVIR PARA SIEMPRE
LYNN, CUANDO TE LLEVEN AL CAMPAMENTO, LLEVA A OREN AL PRINCIPAL Y MANDANOS UN HELICÓPTERO
QUIERO VER EL DESPEGUE DE LA NAVE DE MIR...
66

"The Mangler doesn't seem like a threat to me anymore."

©1972 Field Enterprises, Inc.

AFTER A PAINFUL WALK FROM THE HOSPITAL, DANNY REACHES THE PHONE BOOTH DESIGNATED IN THE KIDNAP NOTE!
NO SIGN OF LEE ROY!...WONDER WHAT I'M SUPPOSED TO DO NOW?
John Saunders Al Williams 6-26
MAYBE THEY LEFT ANOTHER MESSAGE INSIDE...(PUFF)... GOTTA CLOSE DOOR SO LIGHT WILL GO ON...
RAVINE?? THERE'S THAT BLASTED NAME AGAIN... BUT WHAT'S IT GOT TO DO WITH LEE ROY AND ME?
PHEW! THE PAIN IN MY SIDE IS SO BAD THAT IT'S MAKIN' MY EYES BLURRY... MUST HAVE A DIME SOMEPLACE... AHAA!!
John Saunders Al McWilliams 6-27
NOW LET'S FIND OUT WHAT KIND OF A SICK JOKE SOMEBODY IS TRYING TO PLAY... 4... 7... 3... 6...
...AND, IN A GARAGE A FEW BLOCKS AWAY,
AH... MR RAVINE! YOU CALLED MUCH SOONER THAN WE EXPECTED... BUT WE'RE READY FOR YOU! NOW LISTEN VERY CAREFULLY!
NOW LOOK, WHOEVER YOU ARE, MY NAME IS RAVEN.... NOT RAVINE! WHERE'S MY BROTHER?
COME NOW, MR. RAVINE... ONE WOULD EXPECT A MORE CREATIVE PLOY FROM A MAN OF YOUR INTELLIGENCE!
RAVINE CALL 678-6075
John Saunders Al Williams 6-28
YOUR BROTHER IS QUITE SAFE AND WE HAVE JUST DISPATCHED A CAR BY RADIO TO PICK YOU UP AT THAT PHONE BOOTH!... WAIT THERE!
I LOOK FORWARD TO MEETING YOU, MR. RAVINE! OUR GROUP HAS ALWAYS ADMIRED YOUR, ER... SKILL!
YOUR RADIO DISPATCHED ESCORT IS WAITING FOR YOU NOW, MR. RAVINE, SO... UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN... 'CLICK'
HEY... WAI...
John Saunders Al Williams 6-29
WE WERE ADVISED THAT YOU MIGHT NOT FEEL WELL, SIR... SO WE ACQUIRED "SUITABLE TRANSPORTATION"!
TELEPHONE
MEANWHILE, FIFTY MILES AWAY!
THE TEAM IN THE CITY JUST REPORTED, COMMANDER! OUR, ER... "GUEST" IS ON THE WAY!
EXCELLENT! I'LL CHECK THE LABORATORY TO MAKE SURE EVERYTHING IS READY!
PROJECT OVERHAUL
ABSOLUTELY NO ADMITTANCE
AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY

Strip by assistant (1957-58) Alden (Al) McWilliams (with John Saunders), the strip was called DATELINE: DANGER!

him so many times that you just *know* that Kirby can beat him in a fight, so there's no suspense there. Why can't we bring up a tough character that the reader may wonder if he may not get the best of Kirby?" So Fred wrote the story about Johnny Gatt, a gun freak who was a crack shot. But since then we've brought the Mangler back because he's just such a good character.

In the second part of this "Ripping" interview John Prentice goes from the torch on the Statue of Liberty to Mount Olympus, with Menaces, Mars and Hercules and gets introduced to females in bikinis without *navels . . .*

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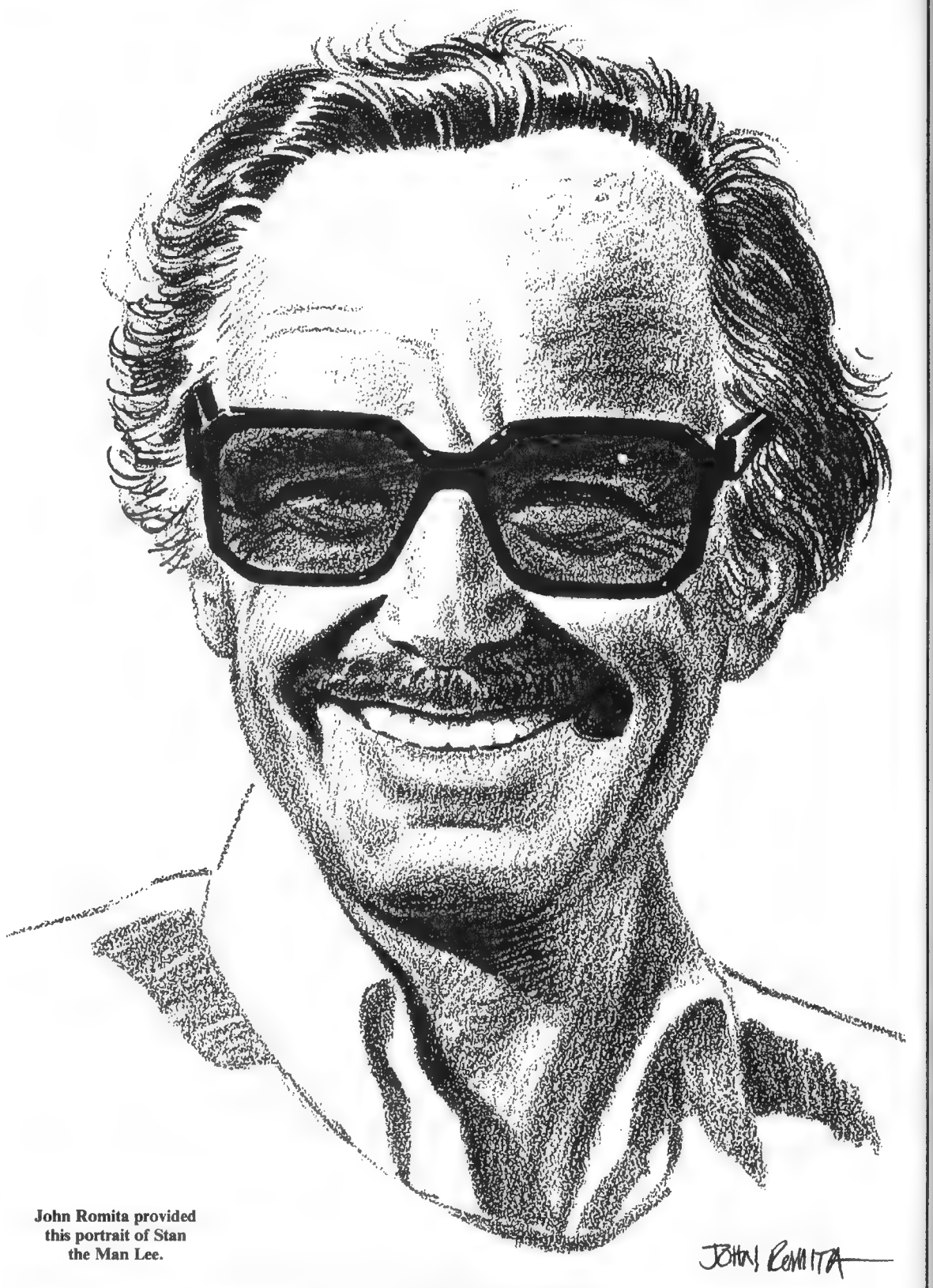
A COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION

"What I tried to do in the comics was give



John Romita provided this portrait of Stan the Man Lee.

every character his own individual style."

STAN LEE

Yes, Virginia, there is an Asgard. They don't call it that, of course. They call it California, and the Bifrost Bridge is really the Golden Gate. There, in the City of Angels and Stars, dwells the father of the many gods and the author of his own universe, Stan Lee. Let the four corners of the four-color world resound with his name! Lee, the All-Wry! Lee, the All-Cheerful! Lee, one of those troublesome legends who refuses to rest on his past accomplishments, and one of the most accessible deities you're ever likely to meet . . .

DAN HAGEN *I was thinking about the HULK TV movies recently. A sort of realism worked in the TV series, but it seemed to me that when you have two super heroes, an attempt at realism doesn't really fly. Are they too restrained in those things? Should they go more for the really comic-book stuff or not?*

STAN LEE: Oh, I think they just didn't do it right. I think it could work if it were done a little bit differently. For instance, in the one with the Hulk and Daredevil, I didn't like the idea of both of them knowing the other's secret identity right away — and the same with the Hulk and Thor, you know, where each one knew who the other one was? It would have been much more dramatic if Daredevil never knew that David Banner was really the Hulk, or if Banner didn't know that the blind lawyer was really Daredevil, I think there would have been much more interest. But the minute they both knew who the other one was and they're just fighting together as allies, then I feel it becomes too comic-booky. It's just two guys in costume, doing whatever the hell they're doing.

DAN: *I see what you mean. They gave away a good plot development.*

STAN: You see, one of the beautiful things about secret identities is it gives an additional layer of drama and interest to the situation. That's why, all these years, nobody knew Superman was Clark Kent, nobody knows Spider-Man is Peter Parker and so forth. Because that somehow adds another layer of interest and, I think, even a little more maturity and sophistication to it. The minute you've got a guy running around in a costume and people know who he is . . .

DAN: *What's the point of the costume?*

STAN: Yeah. Now, another thing is that in the Daredevil show, the costume was terrible.

DAN: *Yeah, a ninja thing. That was an example of what I was talking about. They're doing it, but resisting it.*

STAN: Exactly. One of the things I told them — and again, I was a consultant; as you know, when you're a consultant, you can talk but nobody has to listen — I told them that the fight scenes were terrible. He was fighting like **Chuck Norris** or like **Bruce Lee,** like anybody you see in any of these ninja movies. And he should have been fighting like a gymnast. What I always tried to do in the comics was give every character his own individual style. Captain America wouldn't fight like Daredevil, and neither of them would fight like Iron Man or like someone else. They all should have their own styles. And of course, it was silly-looking. It looked like he was wearing a blindfold.

DAN: *Sort of a fencing mask.*

STAN: Those are little things, but I think cumulatively, when you put them all together, it takes away. What I'm getting at is, I don't think it didn't work because you can't have two super heroes together in film. I think it didn't work because it just really wasn't done the way it might have been.

DAN: *I'd love to see two super heroes together in the show . . .*

STAN: I'd love to see one, done well.

DAN: *The SUPERMAN and BATMAN movies illustrate to me that the mass audience can accept comic-book stuff.*

STAN: Of course, of course. It just has to be done right. Now with the Thor and Hulk show, I think the problem there was that they just changed it too much. They didn't do Thor the way he should have been done. Thor is supposed to be . . . I'm trying to think of his name.

DAN: *Dr. Don Blake.*

STAN: *(Laughter.)* Dr. Blake. I forget their names sometimes. But they made him two separate people. Instead of Blake turning into Thor, they had Dr. Blake talking to Thor. So it wasn't really our Thor. They changed Thor's personality . . .

DAN: *Also he wasn't a god, he didn't fly, you lost all of that real fantasy.*

STAN: That's right. So it's still hard to know. Would our character done correctly have worked?

DAN: *Daredevil was closer, I thought.*

STAN: Daredevil was much closer than Thor. Well, it was more logical that it would be, because it's easier to do a guy who's a lawyer and so forth . . .

The Hulk, Captain America, Red Skull, Spider-Man, Dr Strange, Fantastic Four and The Silver Surfer ©1980 Marvel Entertainment Group Inc. Photos from CAPTAIN AMERICA film ©1980 Time Century Film Corporation

I WANT TO BE YOUR DOG

COMING IN AUGUST from EROS COMICS

©1990 Ho Che Anderson

"TV productions were better than they might have been."

DAN: *It's closer to what they do on TV already.*

STAN: Yeah. Doing a god . . . *(Laughter.)* People don't have that much familiarity with them.

Let me just mention, though, if you're going to write this, that I don't want to sound like I'm knocking those TV productions, because, by and large, they were still both intelligently done and they had stories that weren't silly.

DAN: *I agree. The Hulk/Thor movie got ratings through the roof.*

STAN: And **Bill Bixby,** who directed them, and **Gerry DiPego,** who wrote them, are both incredibly talented guys. It's easy for me to criticize, but these things are very difficult to do. The one thing they did bring to both shows was some intelligence and some credibility. And they were shows that an adult could watch. I felt that things could have been done differently, but they were still a hell of a lot better than they might have been.

DAN: *I agree. I don't want to imply that they were terribly bad. It was just a little disappointing. Now, the CAPTAIN AMERICA movie is next, I guess.*

STAN: CAPTAIN AMERICA is almost finished. I understand that they want to shoot a few scenes over and give it a slightly different ending. I had seen the script on the revisions, and it looks pretty good to me. And I believe any day now they'll be heading for Yugoslavia to shoot those last scenes over again.

DAN: *I think that ought to be a great Trivial Pursuit question: What do J.D. Salinger and Captain America have in common? So you liked the script?*

STAN: It was a good script. Now, we had a number of problems. One of the things that happened was that the script was so good and so rich and the director, **Albert Pyun,** was so in love with the script that

Everyone's favorite green/gray behemoth — The Hulk, by Erik Larsen.

"CAPTAIN AMERICA is almost finished.

Captain America (Matt Salinger), with his bullet-proof shield, represents the best of mankind.

he filmed everything. And by the time the movie was shot it ran about three hours. Well, we couldn't have it that long, so it had to go to the cutting room. And by cutting almost an hour and a half out of it, we had something that was more fragmented and not as smooth as it should have been or as the script had been. Ever since then, they've been working night and day to add little bits and to smooth it out and make it not seem jerky because of the parts that were eliminated. So it's a little hard for me to judge it at the moment. I would have to sit down and see it again. But I've still got my fingers crossed. It was, originally I think, a fine script with a lot of good characterization. At least in the original script, it wasn't just a silly action movie.

DAN: *I saw the stills. They looked good. And it seems to me that they've retained some of what you put into Captain America in the 1960s — the "man out of time."*

STAN: They definitely tried to do that, and I think it came across. I think **Scott Paulin,** the actor who played Red Skull, is magnificent. I don't think it could have been done better than he did it. It was a joy to watch.

DAN: *How did you come up with that "man out of time" thing? Why revive Captain America in the first place, back when you were doing it? I know that was a busy time, and it's hard to remember all those things, but I always thought the "man out of time" bit gave it a certain poignance and really added an edge to the character.*

STAN: Well, I'll tell you what happened, we were starting Marvel Comics, and we started it with the FANTASTIC FOUR and SPIDER-MAN and THE HULK and all of those. I think when I did FANTASTIC FOUR, which was the first one, I decided I wanted four characters that had very definitely different powers. It occurred to me that the Human Torch, whom we had owned years ago and who was created by **Carl Burgos,** certainly had a unique power — to be able to burst into flame and fly. There hadn't been a Human Torch for years, and I figured, "Gee, let's get that character again, but I would change him and make him a teenager and he'd be the brother of the girl and so forth." Then after we were in the swing of things, so to speak, I don't remember which issue of the FANTASTIC FOUR it was, but I thought, "We seem to have succeeded with the Torch. It would be fun to bring back the Sub-Mariner," I think in the . . .

DAN: *Third or fourth issue, somewhere like that.*

STAN: Somewhere in there. And that worked. Then I thought, "Wouldn't it be great if we could make Captain America popular again?" Because over the years we had tried to resurrect him, and he never worked. After World War II ended, he was just a guy in a dumb

They want to give it a slightly different ending."

costume running around. I mean, that's the way a lot of people perceived him . . .

DAN: *And a particularly cornball costume.*

STAN: Yeah. So I thought, "Wouldn't it be fun to say he had been frozen in the ice for these two decades or whatever it was, and now he's back?" I'm always trying to think of some way to give them a personality hook or a character trait that would make them unique. And I thought, "Wouldn't it be great? Here's a guy who's been out of it for 20 years, and suddenly everything is changed!" He never knew what a hippie was. There are hippies, there are guys smoking marijuana, all those things . . .

DAN: *And all these people with their disintegrating belief in America.*

STAN: That's right! And here's a guy who'd be considered totally square. He believes in liberty and freedom and the flag. It was the Vietnam War, and nobody was interested in war anymore. People were turned off. So I figured, "Let's give it a shot." So that was the reason for the man out of time, out of sync.

DAN: *And also there you take what people would criticize about him — "He's cornball, he's passé, he's World War II" — and turn it on its head and make it an advantage instead of a disadvantage.*

STAN: Well, I think it's very perceptive of you to say that, because one thing I always tried to do was take things that were disadvantages and try to make a plus out of them. And that used to happen to me a lot in the stories that I wrote. You know, very often — in fact, most of the time after we got started — the artist did most of the plotting. I would just give him a one-liner, like, "Let's feature Dr. Doom and he goes back in time" or something. And whoever the artist was, he'd practically do the whole story, but when I would get the artwork back and I had to put the copy in, very often there were things that I thought didn't work or were foolish or didn't make sense or something.

Instead of having the artist redraw and go to a lot of trouble, the thing that was the most fun for me was to find out how I could take that discordant element in the story and make it seem as if we purposely did that to embellish the story. You know what I mean? And turn it into a good story point. It was like doing a crossword puzzle.

DAN: *You can do that in many ways, but perhaps by having the characters comment on what a silly thing it was . . .*

The Red Skull, portrayed by Scott Paulin, is the human embodiment of evil.

STAN: Exactly, exactly.

DAN: *And then they share the in-joke with the reader.*

STAN: For example, I think there was a time when I had Spider-Man or some character walking down the street and he just got into the costume and I thought it looked silly. So I had the character say, "I feel like a nut, dressed like this."

DAN: (Laughter.) *I was thinking too, along that line, super hero comics have these conventions, in many ways like Broadway musicals, of all things. In Broadway musicals, people walk down the street and they burst into song and the audience accepts it . . .*

STAN: *(Laughter.)* That's right.

DAN: *. . . because they accept the convention and they like it. And I think super hero comics are similar. People have double identities, they get dressed up, they have super powers.*

STAN: That's a very good analogy, because in a musical you're in the middle of the city and you burst into song and the orchestra comes up from nowhere . . .

DAN: *And nobody notices. Utterly silly elements. And now both of those mediums are twisting or pulling those conventions in order to make them more interesting, as you did back in the '60s.*

STAN: Hey, I think I ought to be interviewing you . . .

DAN: (Laughter.) *Well, thanks. Let me see, what else? A DAREDEVIL TV show spinoff from THE HULK, or any others?*

STAN: You know, I hate mentioning things, and I'll tell you why — only because they change. And by the time it comes out, people either think I was lying or I don't know anything. So if you could just preface anything you write by saying that's the way it is at the moment . . . I never know. For instance, Cannon was supposed to do SPIDER-MAN, and then Cannon was bought by Pathe, and **Menahem Golan** — who had the rights to Spider-Man — went over and formed

"As it looks now Columbia may buy SPIDER-MAN."

21st Century. And they're supposed to do SPIDER-MAN and now they're talking to Columbia, and the way it looks now Columbia may end up buying SPIDER-MAN from 21st Century. Each time I put a notice about something in the Bullpen Bulletins page or somewhere, I never know if, by the time it comes out, it'll have all changed.

But at the moment, we are putting together a DAREDEVIL show with **Shelley Duvall,** who does . . .

DAN: *FAIRY TALE THEATRE.*

STAN: And I'm hoping that we may put it on Fox television network.

DAN: *Great!*

STAN: But again, it's not contracted for. But that's what our plan is.

DAN: *And Iron Man? There was talk he was close to a movie.*

STAN: IRON MAN — we're negotiating with Universal Pictures to do that, and are presently working with **Michael Miner,** who was the co-writer of ROBOCOP. But again, we hope the deal goes through with Universal.

DAN: *Sure. One of the things you did in Marvel Comics, of course, was to create a whole, interconnected universe, a little like the WAR AND PEACE of comic books. Were you conscious of doing that or did that just evolve? Did you enjoy doing it?*

STAN: I enjoyed it, I was conscious of it, I didn't know it would turn into such a big thing. The reason I did it is that in the beginning I was writing almost all the books myself, and that made it easier for me. If I had trouble dreaming up a plot, I would say, "Gee, won't it be fun if Iron Man meets the Hulk or Thor meets Captain America?" or whatever the hell it was, you know. So I would put them in the same story.

And it was easier for me to do than it is, I would imagine, for the guys today. Because I don't know how they can even keep track of all the permutations. But when you write them all yourself, I would say, "Well, let's see, I'll have Thor do this. No, he did that in my last story, so I'll have him do that instead." And I could sort of have an overview of where they were all going. And it was fun, it kept my own interest up. And it was always fun to think "What would it be like if these guys met? How would they act and what would happen?"

DAN: *Before we get off Captain America, I wanted to ask you this, too. This is something I don't think I've ever seen you address, and again you may not remember, but in about the 16th issue of THE AVENGERS you dropped all the big guns — Thor, Iron Man — and went with Captain America and Hawkeye and Scarlet Witch, the minor characters. Why did you think of doing that?*

STAN: You know, Dan, I really don't remember. Did I do it, or did the writer after me do it?

DAN: *I think you did it.*

STAN: Did I? I must have had a reason.

DAN: *They were all title characters, and maybe you figured you wanted to spotlight minor ones . . .*

STAN: That may have been part of it, and I'm guessing now, but usually when those things happen it's because you want to give the book a shot in the arm as far as the sales go. I may have figured, "Maybe it's getting a little dull. It's the same thing all the time. Maybe I'll try to see if I can stimulate more interest by getting new characters."

And it may also have been — and again I'm guessing — because I was finding it too difficult to seem to be realistic. For example, in his own book, Thor might have been trapped in Asgard somewhere, and yet in THE AVENGERS book, he's here attending a meeting. I seem to remember, I did get mail from a lot of readers about that point. and I felt, "Maybe it's destroying the pseudo-realism of the stories, where a character is dying in one story and in the other story he's the chairman of the Avengers meeting." I think that had a lot

"I think they're geniuses at Marvel. I really admire them."

to do with it, as a matter of fact.

And as I say, I don't know how the hell they manage to overcome that problem today, with the characters appearing in a hundred different books.

DAN: *I was going to ask you about that, too, for Spider-Man. Now he has, what, a fourth title? He's a busy guy, isn't he?*

STAN: They all are. Spider-Man is. Wolverine is. The X-Men in general are.

DAN: *I guess their schedules are as busy as yours.*

STAN: I have to tell you, I think they're geniuses at Marvel because they make it all somehow tie in. They get these series where something happens in one issue of one book and it's part of what happens in another issue of another book and it's also going on in the guy's own book — and it all works out.

DAN: *A logistic nightmare.*

STAN: And I really admire them for being able to do it, and they do it pretty well most of the time.

DAN: *I remember when I first visited New York City, I looked up and I said to Dave Kraft, "You mean Spider-Man swings between* these *buildings?" They looked closer together in the comics.*

STAN: *(Laughter.)* He only does it on narrow streets.

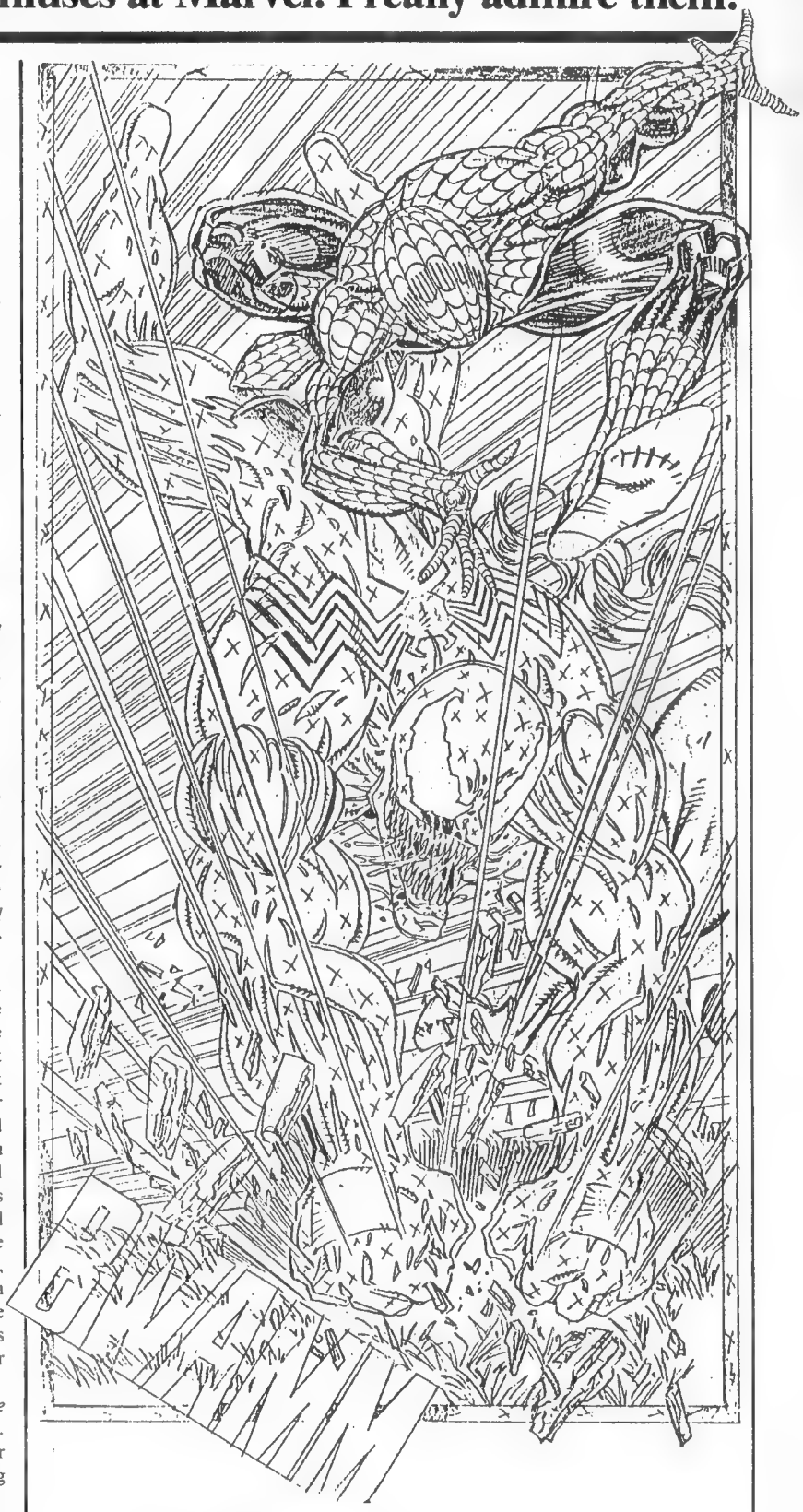
DAN: *That's very convenient, that crime occurs there. On the double identity, too, I always thought that at least Spider-Man has a full face mask. All these other characters running around with secret identities who have domino masks and things, it's hard to imagine no one would know.*

STAN: You're right. I used to lecture a lot, and I still do a little bit. And one thing that always got a laugh out of the audience was that I would talk about Superman. And I would say, "I don't know if you ever thought of it . . ." I wear a pair of glasses, you know, and I would say, "Here I am, **Stan Lee,** talking to you and I'm wearing my glasses. Now if I suddenly take my glasses off, and muss my hair a little bit, I'm sure you're all thinking, 'Gee, who's this new guy on the podium? Where'd Stan go?'" And I'd say, "Has anybody ever thought of that with Superman and Clark? I mean, it's the *same guy!* All he does is put on his glasses and he gets a little tousled forelock over his forehead, and nobody knows!"

DAN: *Exactly. That's stretching the conventions as far as believability will go.*

STAN: But I think the readers of super hero stories apparently are quite willing to suspend disbelief in those areas.

DAN: *In some things and not in others. It's always interesting. I know from all*



Venom and Spidey, from issue 232. Pencils provided by Erik Larsen.

"I was always a little ashamed of myself that I didn't

from anything else?

STAN: So it's hard to predict these things.

DAN: *By the way, I just wanted to mention that the MARVEL MASTERWORKS series is wonderful, and it's kind of every comic-book collector's dream, don't you think? Has it been getting good reception?*

STAN: Oh, wonderful, and I was surprised. Because when they told me the price — 29 bucks! — I said, "Nobody's going to spend that." But they're selling well.

DAN: *And DC's doing it too, and yours is cheaper than theirs.*

STAN: That's right. and everybody who buys them seems to like them. when I go to comic-book conventions and there's an autograph session, I seem to get more of those to autograph than anything.

DAN: *And of course it's a permanent form on good stock. It's what everybody always wanted in the original runs of the comics.*

STAN: Just as a matter of pride and satisfaction, I love having them myself.

DAN: *And they'll be around forever. Comic books ultimately deteriorate.*

STAN: One thing that I'm happy about is that we're going to do the Silver Surfer in that form, and I always felt that the SILVER SURFER series that I did with **John Buscema** is one of the greatest comic-book series of all time — owing more to his artwork than to my stories. *(Laughter.)* I just thought they were such beautiful books, and the fact that they're going to be in the MASTERWORKS format really excited me.

DAN: *Why did it take so long to do MARVEL MASTERWORKS, though? I would have thought somebody would have said, 10 years ago, "Let's put these out in hardcover."*

STAN: Oh, I think it took 'til now to realize that the market is really there. You know, it's only been these past few years that any of the comics are being done in real expensive formats. We're making toys and models and things like that. It took a while for people to realize that there is so much interest and enthusiasm for these super hero characters.

DAN: *And back then when you started Marvel, you were saying, "Someday I'll write the Great American Novel," and without knowing it, you were, in a way. Now they're in hardcover, and expensive hardcover.*

STAN: That's a very interesting point, and you're absolutely right. For the first years, I always felt, "Why am I wasting time doing this?" I was always a little ashamed of myself that I didn't just quit and take a flyer on writing novels or movies or something. But apparently it turned out the same anyway.

DAN: *Yes. I see again that Jack Kirby has been claiming creation of everything. Do you just pretty much ignore that, or what?*

STAN: I have to ignore it because . . . it's a very difficult thing for me. I don't want to make a big issue of it. I don't even want to discuss it, to tell you the truth. It's a very unpleasant thing.

DAN: *I imagine, because you worked together for years.*

STAN: Yeah. I don't even like talking about it.

DAN: *Dave Kraft wanted me to remind you that years ago in COMICS INTERVIEW #5 he published your original plot synopsis for FANTASTIC FOUR #1.*

STAN: Oh, I hope he saved it . . .

DAN: *He printed it and if it ever comes up in a discussion or something, that clearly shows that you defined all the characters, you described them and their interrelationships and what their personalities are.*

STAN: I did that with all of them. I don't know why I saved the FANTASTIC FOUR one, but nobody ever thought those things would amount to anything or anybody would care about them, so I did it and I threw them away. I did that with every book we did.

DAN: *So if you ever want to throw proof in somebody's face, it's there.*

STAN: Well, bless your heart. I'm glad you reminded me.

DAN: *The other thing I wanted to talk about was the future of comics. I've got a Nintendo now — and I've got the X-MEN game — and I look at that and I think, "I used to read comic books. Kids today are* in *them, interactively." But I wonder, is comic-book readership just aging thirtysomething fanboys like me now, spending a lot of money on them? Is there a new readership coming up? Do kids read anymore?*

STAN: Well, it's interesting that you should say that, because I'm going to head a committee for a foundation called the American Spirit Foundation. The committee I'm heading is going to be called Entertainers for Education. And I'm going to gather together some of the biggest names in entertainment, and we're going to try to find ways to make textbooks and education as exciting for kids as watching television or playing video games.

And when you mention comic books,

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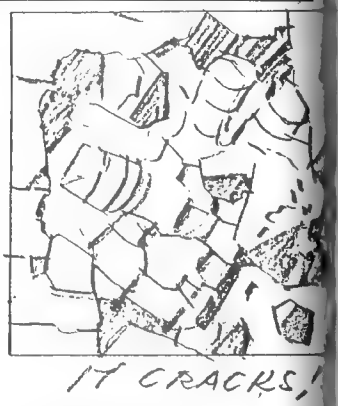

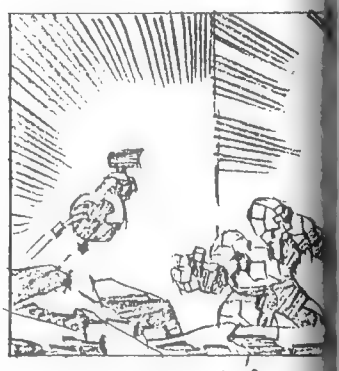

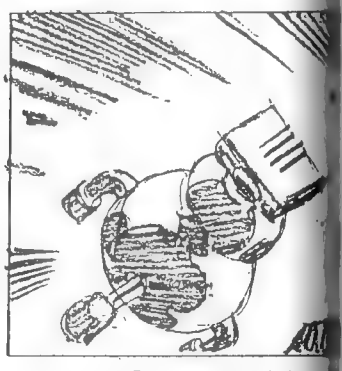

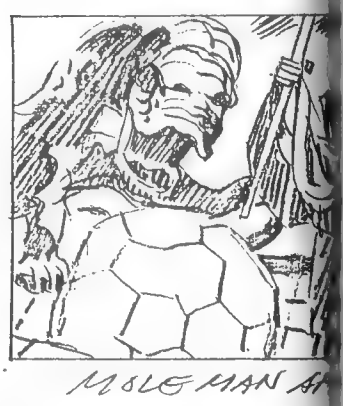

take a flyer on writing novels or movies or something."

One of Stan's television (cartoon) scripts . . . Visual interpretations provided by former Marvelite Jack Kirby.

"The Silver Surfer I did with John Buscema is the greatest

A BEING WHOM WE SHALL CALL THE SILVER SURFER, FOR WANT OF A BETTER NAME!
THE SILVER SURFER, ZOOMING ALONG THE STARWAYS LIKE A LIVING COMET-- WITH THE FREEDOM AND WILD ABANDON OF THE WIND ITSELF!
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STAY WHERE YOU ARE, INTRUDER! SURRENDER-- OR DIE!
3
LET US LEAVE THIS PLANET! I SHALL FIND YOU OTHER WORLDS!
WORLDS WITHOUT LIMIT NOW AWAIT MY COMING!
2

— owing more to his art than my stories.” *(Laughter.)*

1: The Silver Surfer's first appearance, F.F. #48, 1966, by Lee, Kirby and Sinnott. 2: From Silver Surfer's solo book, issue 1, 1968, by Lee, Buscema and Sinnott. 3: S.S. #18 (the last issue), 1970, by Lee, Kirby and Herb Trimpe. 4: From F.F. #122, 1972, by Lee, Buscema and Sinnott. 5: S.S. hardcover novel, 1978, by Lee, Kirby and Sinnott. 6: S.S. second hardcover, “Judgment Day,” 1988, by Lee and Buscema.

"Comics are the only things that young

basically comic books are about the only things that very young people today will read of their own volition, without being told to. And I've discussed this with many, many educators, all over the country. Comic books serve a very valuable function, because they're the one medium that allows a youngster to equate enjoyment with reading.

DAN: *Exactly.*

STAN: You know, when you go to school and you're told to read a school book — even if it's a great school book — you do it reluctantly. "Oh, I've got to read this damn thing." But kids love to read comics. And you can't understand the stories without reading the words. It gives you a facility at reading. The more you do it, the more facile you become, the more adept you become.

DAN: *I always said one of the first words I could read was "meteorite," oddly enough.*

STAN: *(Laughter.)* Well, that's right. And as I say, you equate enjoyment with what's on the printed page. Now, nobody stays with comics forever — or they may stay with comics but once you become adept at reading, you go on to reading other things, too.

And this is something I wasn't aware of in the beginning. I don't want to make it sound like we published comics in order to educate the world. It was an entertainment medium, but we found out that, just peripherally and incidentally, they seem to be serving a great purpose in an age when kids are glued to the screen. Suddenly, there's one thing that'll make them want to read, and that one thing is a comic book. Now, I seem to be a little far afield from your question . . .

DAN: *No, that's where I was going.*

STAN: Will kids want to keep reading comics, or is it just the older people? There is something about the basic comic-book format that I think young people will always find interesting. That is the combination of words and pictures and color, and when you add the element of fantasy, which all our super hero books have, and action and suspense, I think a thousand years from now, kids will be reading comics. They may be three-dimensional comics or holographic or who knows what, but I think people love to read exciting stories, and I think they always will.

You know, they said when television came along, that was the end of the book publishing business. Well, books are bigger than ever.

DAN: *And there are more magazines.*

The old ones died — COLLIER'S, SATURDAY EVENING POST — but the market has fragmented into different things. Yes, I certainly hope that's true, because that worries me a lot. Well, let's see. Any possibility of a Lee/Ditko SPIDER-MAN graphic novel or something like that?

STAN: I would love it! But some people have spoken to **Steve Ditko** about this, and I think I mentioned it to him once years ago, and I do not know his reason, but he has been quoted as saying that the two characters he'll never draw again are Spider-Man and Dr. Strange.

DAN: *His two most famous ones.*

STAN: I don't know why. I wish he would change his mind, but that's the way it stands now. I was **Ditko's** biggest fan, and I still am. I think the man is a genius. He's just as good at story as he is at artwork. His layouts — he can depict situations and scenes and actions and tell a story through pictures as well as anybody I've ever known.

DAN: *One would think a SPIDER-MAN movie or TV show ought to look like Ditko, don't you think? If it can, I know it's hard. And the way Ditko used to pose him on the wall. How spider-like and creepy, in a way. It gave him a real personality as a character.*

people will read without being told to."

STAN: Absolutely. There was a flavor to Steve's artwork that was just beautiful.

DAN: *Did the switch betwen Ditko and John Romita about 40 issues or so into the SPIDER-MAN run change the way you handled the character in any way?*

STAN: A little bit. I had to write Spider-Man, or Peter Parker, as though he was a little more glamorous. John had always done romance stories. Not always, but he had done a lot of them. And it was hard for John to draw a character who was just your average guy, somehow, you know? Even though, in the beginning, John got very close to Steve's style, as it moved along, for him to be more relaxed with it, he had to put it in his own style. And the way an artist drew always affected the way I wrote the stories. I would base every bit of dialogue on the drawings that I looked at, on the expression, on the pose and so forth.

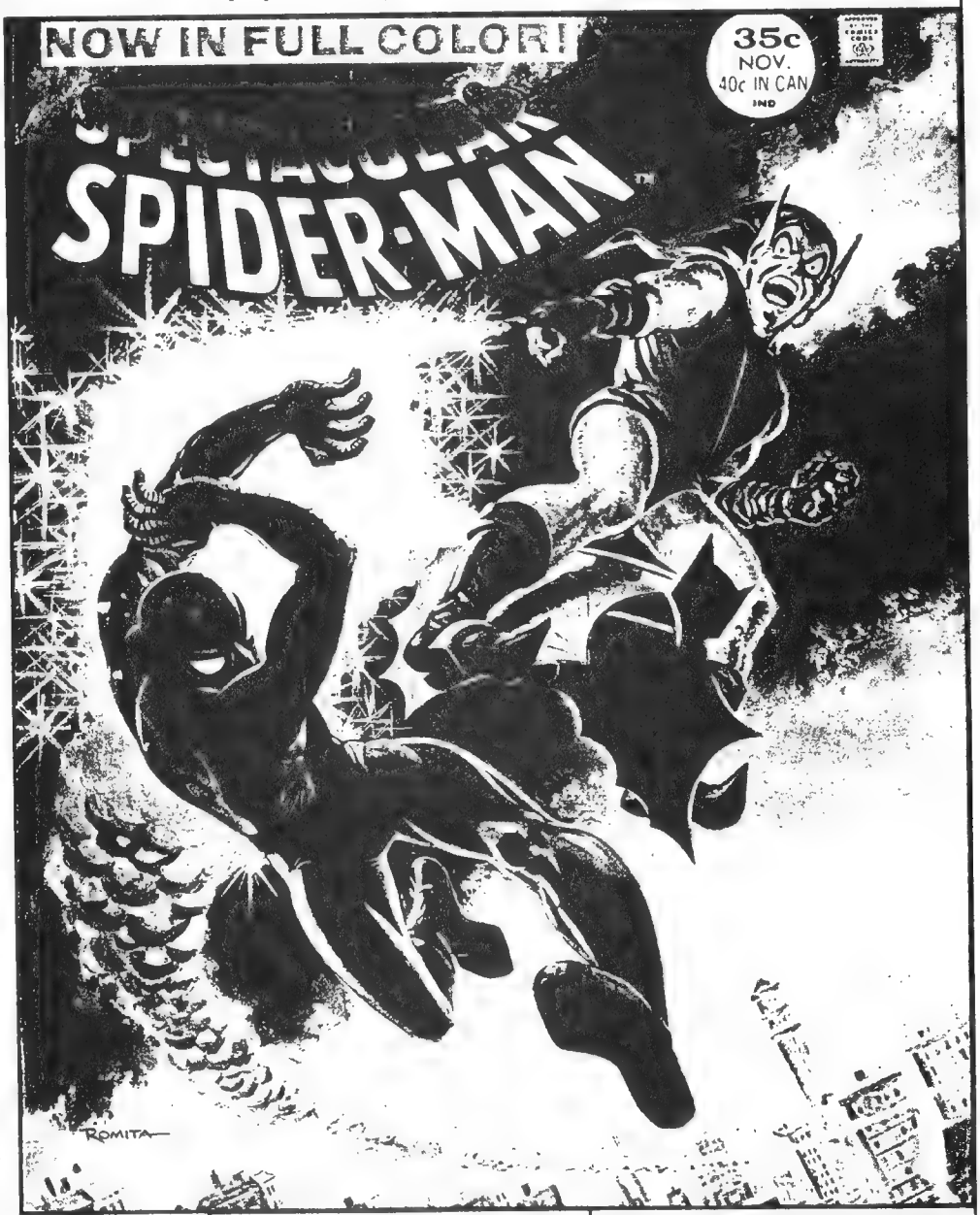
DAN: *So that helped the evolution of the character. You were making him not as much of a nerd already, but this sort of pushed it along.*

STAN: That's right.

DAN: *Which seemed natural to me. Here he was originally, a very, very insecure teenager and he had the hangover of those feelings even after he got super powers. But after a while, surely, super powers would give you a little self-confidence.*

STAN: It was, I think, a natural evolution, anyhow. And as you said, we would have been doing the same thing with **Ditko,** only it would have been more gradual.

DAN: *What about when you created Spider-Man and gave him those powers? I always thought those powers were a nice balance. He's not invulnerable, of course. On the other hand, he's powerful enough to be very, very dramatic from time to time. So he's got vulnerabilities for the plot device but he's also got the fantasy element of really vast strength.*



Here and previous page: two examples of John Romita's cover art. The first is from his first issue of AMAZING SPIDER-MAN, 1966, a line drawing; the other a painting from the second issue of the oversized comic THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN, 1968.

"I think characters have to have some vulnerability."

Captain America (Matt Salinger), and the Red Skull (Scott Paulin) renew their battle when the Skull kidnaps Tom Kimball, the president of the United States.

STAN: Right. Well, I think characters have to have vulnerability, or else they're totally uninteresting. That was the reason they finally decided to get kryptonite for Superman. You've got to have something for the reader to worry about.

About his strength, one of the most brilliant things **Steve Ditko** ever did, and it was all his idea — I don't remember if I told him to do it or not — was the scene where he's trapped, I think, in a subway tunnel and there's water coming up . . .

DAN: *Right, I remember. The Master Planner plot.*

STAN: He had to lift something . . .

DAN: *That was impossible.*

STAN: And Steve did it over a series of pages of him straining. And I think nobody who's ever seen that has been able to forget it. It was just beautiful. And again, he wasn't the Hulk, who just threw it off, or Superman or someone. He had to strain and you, the reader, were not sure whether he'd be able to do it or not. It was just as dramatic a sequence as I think you'll ever find in a comic.

DAN: *I remember that one very well.*

STAN: I know. Anybody who's ever read it has never forgotten it.

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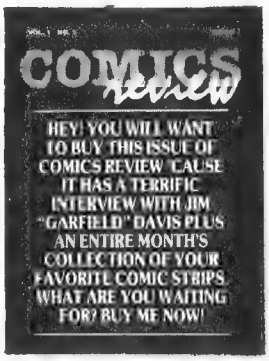
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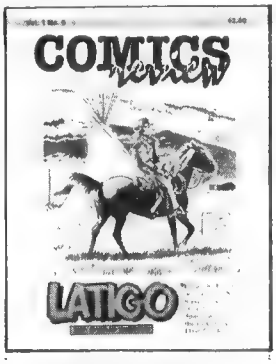

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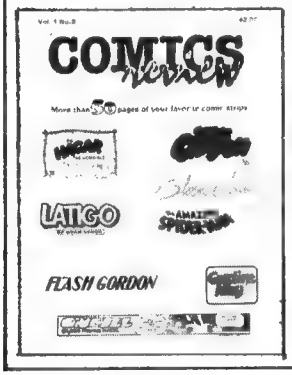

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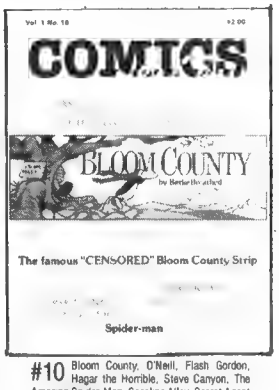

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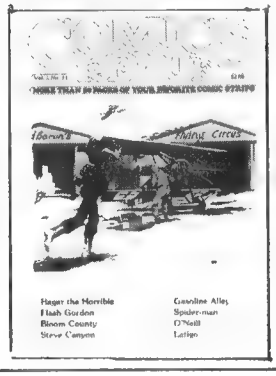

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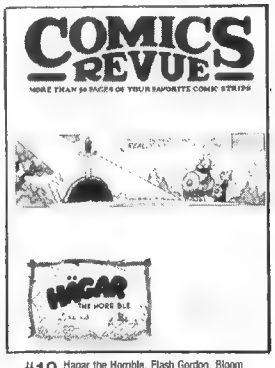

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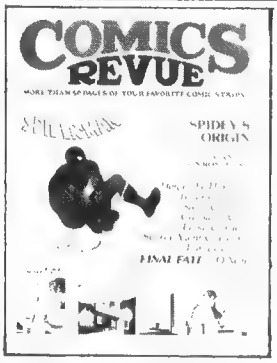

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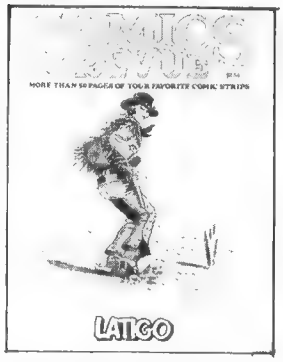

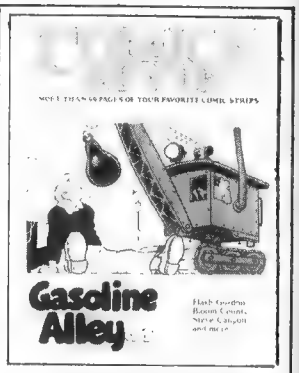

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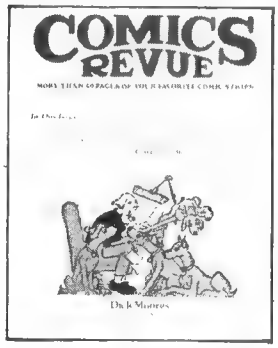

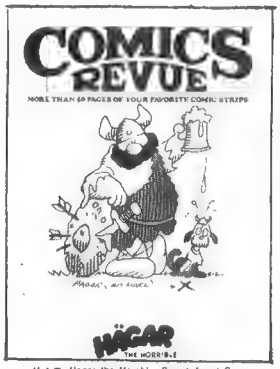

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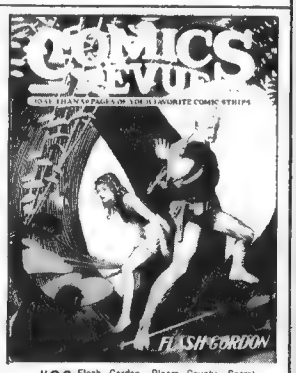

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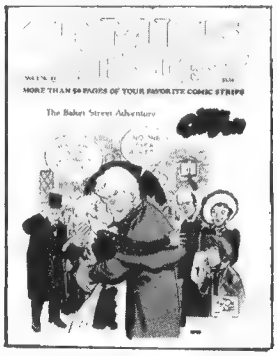

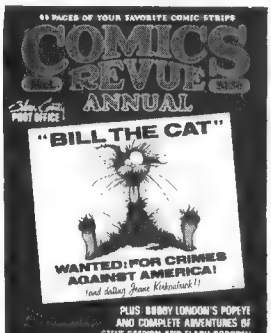
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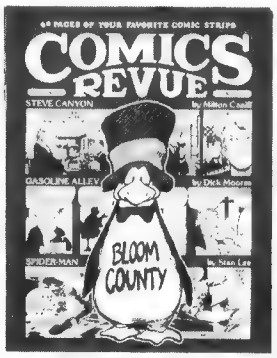

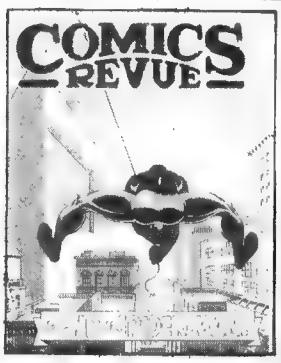

#23 The Amazing Spider-Man, Bloom County, Secret Agent Corrigan, Latigo, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley

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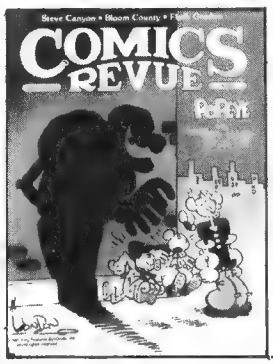

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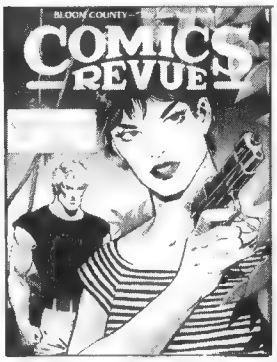
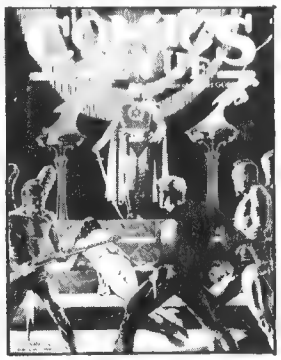


#27 The Phantom, Bloom County Modesty Blaise, Hagar the Horrible, Flash Gordon, Popeye, Steve Canyon, Gasoline Alley

#28 Bloom County, Modesty Blaise, Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, The Phantom, Popeye, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley



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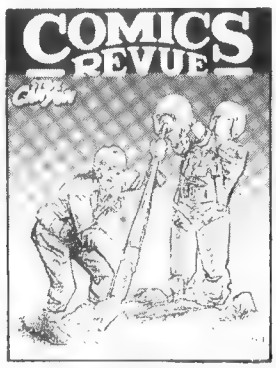

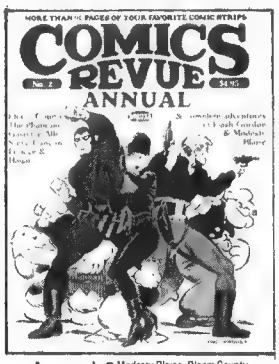

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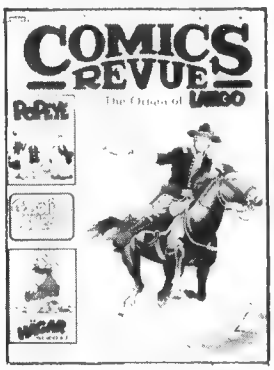

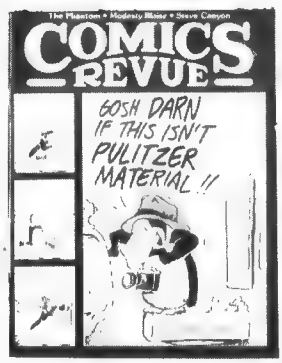

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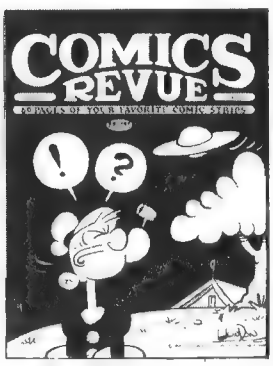

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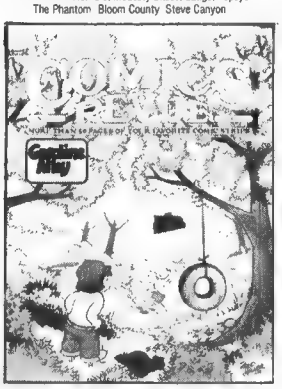

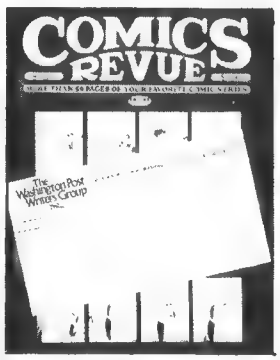

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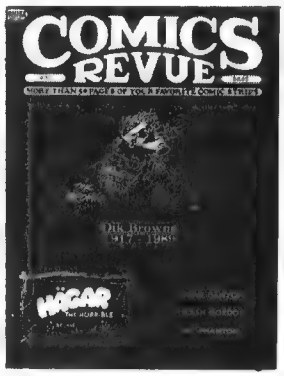

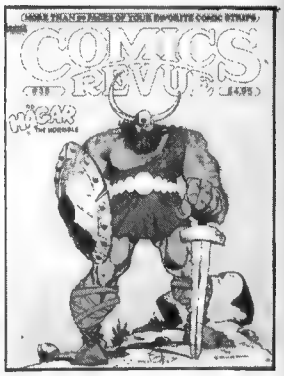

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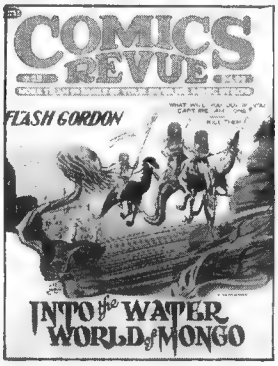

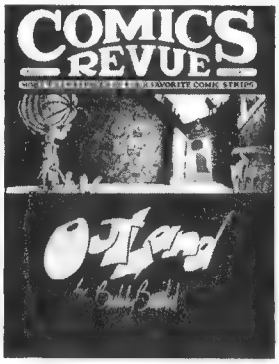

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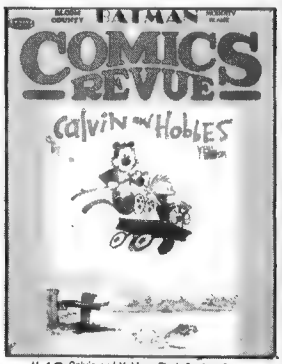

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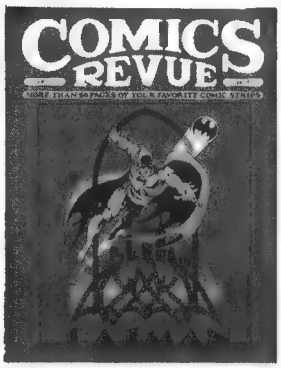

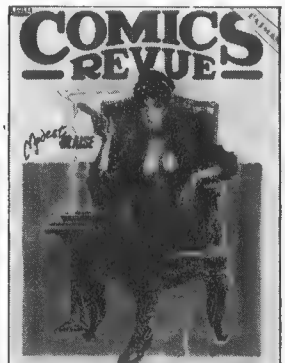

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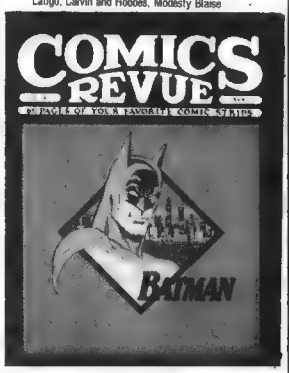

#46 Flash Gordon, Modesty Blaise, Bloom County, Latigo, The Phantom, Calvin and Hobbes, Steve Canyon, Batman, Gasoline Alley

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"I turn a lot of people on . . . to comics."

MARINA ENGLISH

Time was when your local health-food store was staffed by amiable if airheaded counter-culture types who actually believed in what they were selling. They wore T-shirts, sandals, and cotton drawstring pants, and seemed genuinely concerned with the condition of your lower colon. Enter the Eighties. Suddenly holistic health became trendy, and a new breed of coffee-achievers from marketing school turned the natural-foods movement into another fast-buck hustle.

And where once the counter clerk was a pleasant girl in granny glasses and a print prairie dress, she is now an automaton with a frozen-in-plastic smile and a lab coat.

So it was like a breath of naturally pine-scented air when I stopped off in Ari's Health Market in Atlanta and met the new counter-person, Marina English. Silly (by her own admission), spontaneous and, I learned, a comics fan. So I took her to Gorin's Ice Cream Parlor on fabled Peachtree Street (at least they call it "fabled" — if anyone out there has actually heard one genuine fable involving Peachtree Street, I'd like to know about it), to interview her for DAK's "fabled" magazine. As we talked about a variety of subjects — from DARK KNIGHT and the death of Robin to Wonder Woman and her breasts — Marina ate one ice-cream cone, and then another . . .

MARINA ENGLISH: As you can see, I'm a sugar addict. I gave up meat but I'm addicted to sweets. But I don't want to get fat.

BILL CHADWICK: *You certainly don't look in danger of that. In fact, with your martial-arts workouts, that must keep you in pretty good shape.*

MARINA: Yeah, especially doing the horse stance. *(Demonstrates. It's kind of a quarter-squat with clenched fists held at sides.)* Really strengthens my legs. I've got really strong calves. I'd like to get the rest of my legs as good as my calves.

BILL: *Yes, if you don't mind my saying so, I noticed your calves and they are quite good.*

MARINA: Feel them.

BILL: *Huh?*

MARINA: Feel how strong my calves are.

BILL *(Gingerly touching her right calf with his forefinger): My oh my. Hardly any yield.*

MARINA: Now I've got to get the backs of my thighs as good as my calves. I'm going to start lifting weights again.

BILL: *Well, if you do, do me a favor, will you? I admire female bodybuilders, but don't end up like most of them, with pectoral muscle in place of breasts.*

MARINA *(looking down):* No — I'm not likely to lose *these. (Laughter.)*

BILL: *What kind of martial arts are you studying?*

MARINA: Well, up to now it's been hard to be specific about what I've been learning, because my teacher had a whole conglomeration of fighting styles and incorporated all he knew into a combat system. I can't say it's karate or kung-fu or anything. I've been doing that a year. Now I've started to study Wing Chung.

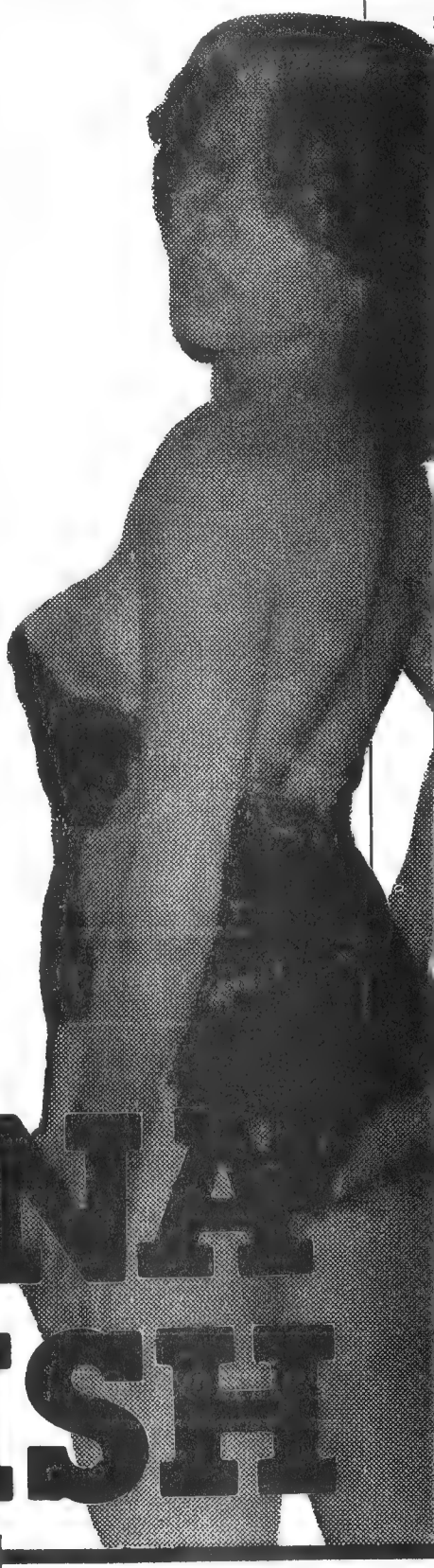
BILL: *Ah, yes — the system Bruce Lee started out with. Have you ever had to use your skills in actual combat?*

MARINA: Oh, no. It's good for balance, and for self-discipline. It helps me get more focused and centered.

BILL: *How often have you been practicing?*

MARINA: I try to do it five days a week.

BILL *(addressing the mike): So, we have a female ninja here! (Laughter.) I won't get fresh in* this *interview, I*



Marina as Marrina (of Alpha Flight).

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"Robin? I'm glad he died! *(Laughter.)*"

Marina as The Whipper Woman.

guarantee you.

MARINA: Stop that! Get your hand off my thigh!

BILL: *Taping an interview is a little like radio — you use the imagination of the listener. Tell me, how long have you been interested in comics?*

MARINA: Well, I only got interested three — no, four — years ago. God, I'm getting old!

BILL: *Here's a girl born in 1967, and* she's *getting old! (Laughter.) But how did you get interested in comics?*

MARINA: The same way most people do — I was turned on to them by a friend. A friend of mine, **Brent O'Quinn,** had *thousands* of comics, and I thought he was crazy! But one day I was at his place, sitting around, and picked up a comic — ELRIC — the very first ELRIC, I think. And I read it, and he let me read another one, and I said, "I want to read another one!" And he let me read another, and another, and he said, "You're hooked. You just don't know it yet." And I thought, "Oh, yeah — right." But then I found myself reading still *more* of his comics. And then I caught myself going into a comic-book store. And then I caught myself spending large amounts of money on comic books. And that's how I became a fan.

BILL: *And on the seventh day, you rested. But your remark about spending large amounts of money . . . that raises a question. I have a general idea from your employment of how much you are probably earning a week, and I know comics certainly haven't gotten any cheaper lately. Comics must take a really big chunk out of your budget.*

MARINA: Yeah, they sure do. I've had to cut back on a lot of titles. For a long time I bought more comics than I could read, but now I've learned control.

BILL: *What have you cut out?*

MARINA: Some of the comics that tick me off. I am ticked off at SUPERMAN. It used to be at the top of my stack of things to read, and now it's all of a sudden at the bottom. And I'm a little confused if Batman is ever going to have another Robin.

BILL: *What do you think about the death of Robin?*

MARINA: I'm glad he died! *(Laughter.)*

BILL: *You don't like the concept of Robin, or you didn't like Jason Todd?*

MARINA: He became a little twerp. He was all right when he was stealing the wheels off the Batmobile but then they turned him into a little creep.

BILL: *So when the Joker took a crowbar to him you really enjoyed it?*

MARINA: It was excellent! *(Laughter.)* You know what bothered me about DARK KNIGHT? It's set in the future, so now they're writing BATMAN to come out the way his future is shown in DARK KNIGHT. For example, they made reference to Robin getting knocked off in DARK KNIGHT, right?

BILL: *Yes, I think he mentions that Jason Todd died for our sins, or something.*

MARINA: And they knock off Robin in the BATMAN comic. I'm glad he's dead because he really annoyed me, but they could have kept him as an okay character for a long time and then knocked him off later. The way it's set now, in DARK KNIGHT, Batman could never have another Robin.

BILL: *Well, he gets another Robin in*

"When I go to a comics convention I can dress just

DARK KNIGHT, but you mean between the time Jason Todd died and DARK KNIGHT begins?

MARINA: Right. And Batman's an old fart by that time. That's supposed to be so far ahead, they shouldn't even be considering it now. It seems like some of the comics are already having their future laid out and then they *have* to move in that direction.

BILL: *I felt the same way about the JONAH HEX special where you read how Jonah gets killed about the turn of the century. So even though the regular comic is set in the 1860s and '70s and you know he* has *to be dead by now anyway, and I never really expected Jonah to die in any of the monthly issues, it kind of took away something from the series when I knew that Jonah was eventually going to be shotgunned to death, stuffed and put in a museum — as he was in the Special Death Issue.*

MARINA: Another thing that bothers me — *(taking off eyeglasses)*

BILL: *Why, Miss English, without your glasses, you're beautiful! (Laughter.)*

MARINA: Why, thank you.

BILL: *That's actually a movie cliche from before your time. Like in a Rock Hudson movie, there would be some woman with glasses —*

MARINA: Ohhh — I know what you're talking about!

BILL: *— and you could see that she was gorgeous, with or without the glasses, but there would come a moment when she would take off her glasses, or they would get knocked off, and the guy would look at her in stunned surprise and say, "Why, Miss Klaveman, without your glasses, you're beautiful!" The dork — didn't he notice it before?* (Laughter.) *Anyway, I've waited my whole adult life to use that line, and now I have. But you were saying —*

MARINA: Oh, what ticks me off — the big comic companies having these massive crossovers, where you have to buy every comic they put out to know what's going on. It's beginning to get ridiculous. I have to go over my budget to buy all these comics. One of these storylines — I forget what it was called but something about an alien invading Earth, and DC put it out — was so dumb that I dropped a lot of my DC titles.

BILL: *Voted with your pocketbook?*

MARINA: I kept a lot of their titles, too. I do like quite a lot of DC but I got rid of quite a few.

BILL: *Do you ever go back and look at the DC Silver Age comics?*

MARINA: No, the only Silver Age comics I get are **Walt Disney** comics, MICKEY MOUSE and DONALD DUCK and that's about it.

BILL *(excited): Do you ever read CHIP 'N' DALE?*

MARINA: No.

BILL *(disappointed): Oh. Do your parents think this is a jerky hobby for you to have?*

MARINA: My mother doesn't. My dad thinks I'm wasting my money but he's given up on me. My parents are divorced. I've lived with both of them at times, and they drove me crazy. I moved into my grandmother's attic. She drives me crazy, too, but I don't have to talk to her too much. We help each other out, and that's okay.

BILL: *Does Grandma think you're wasting your money on comics?*

MARINA: No — she's just fascinated by anything I do. Anything I do is okay.

BILL: *How about your friends?*

MARINA: Well, I got my best friend, **Margie Wise,** hooked on comics, and she's my only friend, besides **Brent O'Quinn,** who got *me* hooked on comics and then there's my boyfriend —

BILL: *So basically what you do is convert everyone you know to comic*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Marina English
Born: 12 May 1967 — Atlanta, Georgia. I'm the only native Atlantan that you'll ever meet.
Favorite Comics: NEXUS, BADGER, MIRACLE MAN, GRENDEL.
Favorite Comics Writers: Alan Moore, Matt Wagner, Mike Baron.
Favorite Comics Artists: Steve Rude, Matt Wagner, the Pander Brothers.
Favorite Movies: THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY, HAROLD AND MAUDE, PIPPI LONGSTOCKING, BARON MUNCHAUSEN.
Favorite Authors: Kurt Vonnegut, Roger Zelazny, Robert Asprin.
Pet Peeve (Comics): Books that I like, such as MICRA, suddenly disappearing; others, like MIRACLE MAN, not coming out on time.
Pet Peeve (General): Television. It promotes illiteracy. It is robbing the wits from the youth of America.

as sexy as I want to. And let it all hang out."

books?

MARINA: No, no, no. My boyfriend has been into comics a lot longer than me. It just happened to be a stroke of luck that we're both into comics. But I do turn a lot of people on to comic books. They're fun, easy reading. A lot better than television. If we could just get kids off television and get 'em to read comic books, I think there would be a lot more literate people running around.

BILL: *And there'd be an end to war, too.*

MARINA: Or at least there would be neat wars. Huge robots and laser cannons . . .

BILL: *Now — to jump to something else entirely — you are into comics enough that you go to comics conventions, right?*

MARINA: Yeah, I love to go to conventions. I haven't been to one in about a year because I've been spending all my money on comic books.

BILL: *Now, that's interesting. Comics have gotten so expensive that you can't afford to go to a comics convention. Ladies and gentlemen, there is something seriously wrong with America. (Laughter.) But anyway —*

MARINA: I love to costume. And I love to *not* enter the costume contests.

BILL: *You like, then, what they call "hall costumes?"*

MARINA: I just like to run around in costume and be in character. And be strange all day.

BILL: *Well, the first time I became aware that you were a comic-book fan was when you had a button on your chest, which I happened to notice, which was of your namesake, Marrina of ALPHA FLIGHT. And you told me you once went to a convention dressed as Marrina.*

MARINA: My mother made the costume for me, and it had big, quarter-size sequins all over it, as scales. It's great for my ego, going to these cons. Everywhere I went, a sequin would fall out, and there would be a man coming up behind me saying, "Oh, miss — you dropped one of your sequins!" *(Laughter.)*

BILL: *So basically you used the costume to pick up men, is that it?*

MARINA: Oh, no! No, I do it for ego boost. I'm just a conceited bangle woman.

BILL: *And you also went as someone called the Whipper Woman, correct?*

MARINA: It was at an Alabama convention around Halloween. You have to wear black at Halloween, and the costume was black, and I painted my eyes black and my lips blue. It was a character of my own creation. I really prefer to do my own characters. Once I went to a DixieTrek convention, which was a combination STAR TREK and DR. WHO convention, and everyone there was dressed up as a DR. WHO or STAR TREK character. And I showed up as an alien — a character I created. The most bizarre thing that I could put together: with my hair in a pony-tail atop my head going in all directions, and makeup that didn't fit into codes of female makeup anywhere — weird streaks of color all over my face. I looked like someone from an insane asylum. And all these people at the convention, whom most average people would consider strange, were looking at me as if *I* were strange.

HELP? HELP TO KILL US? DO YOU THINK I'M INSANE?
NO. NO HARM TO YOU ALL IS DIFFERENT NOW.
PLEASE... MIS THROATS ARE CRUSHED. WE CANNOT SPEAK OR CHANGE. THIS BODY DETERIORATES.
LET YOU WORRY'S SO SOGGAMISM ABOUT DESTROY ING MY ONLY BODIES, SO...
WAIT
LET IT DO WHAT IT MUST. IT WON'T HARM US NOW.

Here, and previous page: MIRACLEMAN pencils by John Totleben.

BILL: *You were a weirdo among weirdos. (Laughter.)*

MARINA: Yes!

BILL: *There's always one alien in every crowd. Now, I'm looking at a picture of you in your Marrina costume, and it is pretty . . .*

MARINA: Scanty.

BILL: *That seems to be the norm among women who go costumed at conventions.*

MARINA: Scanty attire? Yes, I'd say so.

BILL: *Do you think that there is a strong exhibitionistic tendency among female fans who go to conventions?*

MARINA: Among some of them, yes. As you can tell, I do not dress in the most sexy, alluring manner, just T-shirt and pants. But when I go to a comics convention I can be just anything I want to be and dress just as sexy as I want to. And let it all hang out.

BILL: *Literally, sometimes, I would imagine.*

MARINA: Pretty much. When your skin is orange or green, people aren't looking at your face anyway. They don't know who you are.

BILL: *Well, among devotees of scanty attire, what would you say is motivating them more, exhibitionism or a need for ego boost?*

MARINA: I think all the women are different. I like to be real nice to people. Ego, that's what I do it for. I like the small conventions better because people are friendlier there. The bigger conventions, like the Atlanta Fantasy Fair, get to be real . . . well, "citified." You know, how in the city everything moves fast and people aren't friendly and are just into their own thing?

BILL: *Yes. That's what I like about the city. (Laughter.)*

MARINA: Well, the Atlanta Fantasy Fair is like that. At smaller conventions I can just relax and be ultra silly, and everyone will think it's okay. It's like being in the country. Everyone's friendly. I can go out in the country and be my silly old self, and everyone's laid back about it. They'll just accept it. "Dern, she's silly, ain't she?" But if I'm in the city, walking along the street and being silly — and I'm silly all the time — people give me odd looks. At the bigger cons, things have gotten so commercial and the people so uptight that if you're not

Comics are "Why men grow up looking at women's breasts."

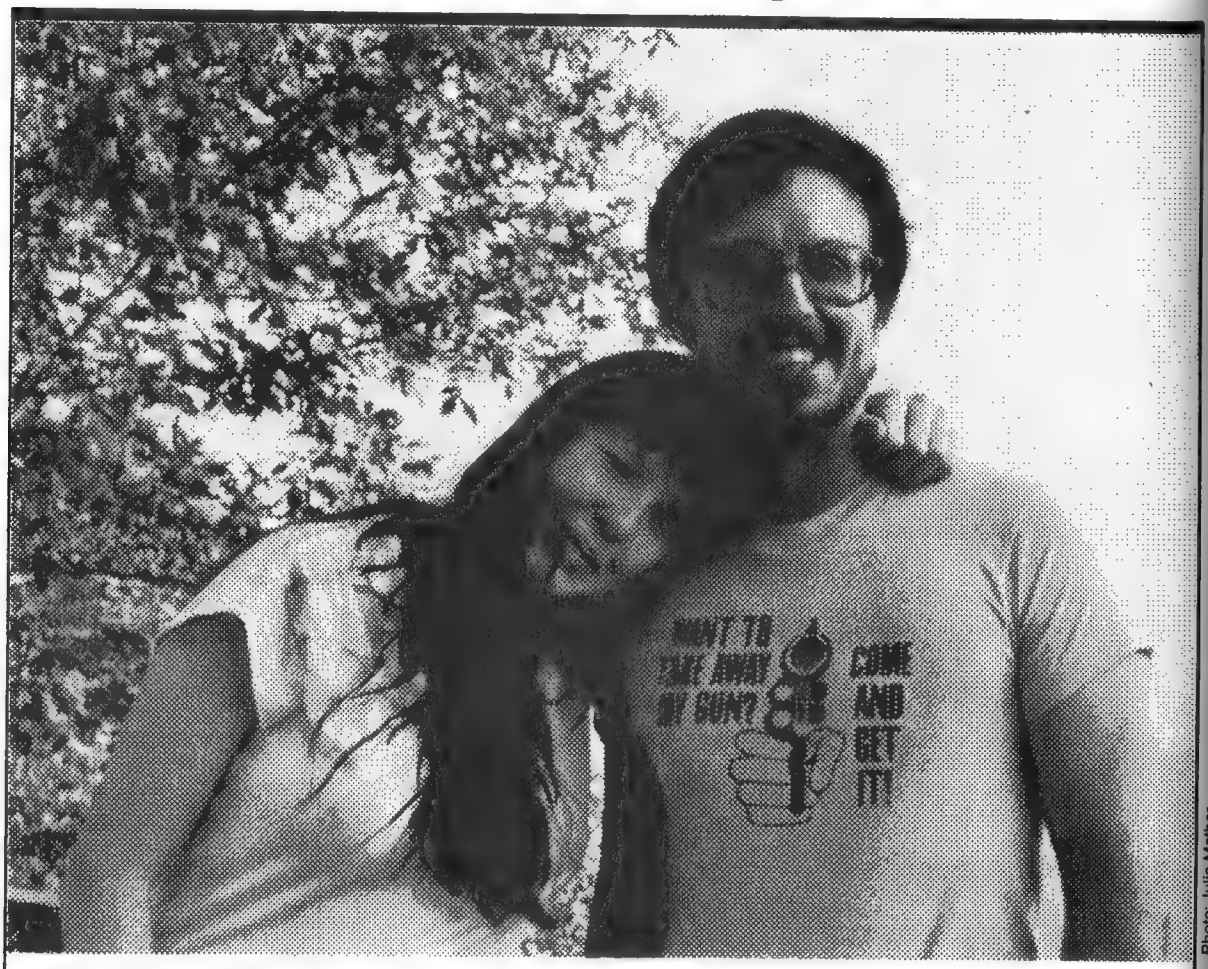

Photo: Julia Mather

Marina, with "Come And Get It" Bill Chadwick, our interviewer. P.S., don't play/mess with this cat/guy!!!

silly in the "appropriate" way, you just don't fit in and you start getting those odd looks again.

BILL: *You mean there's an appropriate way of being silly at conventions?*

MARINA: It seems that you have to . . . it's a frame of mind . . . it's — let me put it this way: There's an attitude people have at these big comic-book conventions, and I don't know how to explain it, but if you've been to one you know what I'm talking about.

BILL: *I know what you're talking about, and I find it hard to describe myself. The word that comes to mind is "preciousness."*

MARINA: At the smaller cons you can be any way you want. It's like I was saying about the DixieTrek convention before. Here I am as an alien and everyone was giving me weird looks.

BILL: *These are people dressed like Dr. Who and Mr. Spock casting stones, as it were, at your alien.*

MARINA: Right. It was bizarre.

BILL: *Have you ever had any interesting experiences meeting comic-book professionals at these conventions? Ever been — oh, I don't know — hit on by Dick Giordano?*

MARINA: *What?*

BILL: *I'm looking for colorful anecdotes here!*

MARINA: Who's **Dick Giordano?**

BILL: *He's Big Editor at DC Comics.*

MARINA: Oh. *(Speaking to mike)* Hey, cut out that I asked that, all right? *(Laughter.)* I have this real problem with names. I just don't remember names. I don't even know *your* name.

BILL: *I'm Mr. Anonymity. (Laughter.) But you must have met some pros sometime at these conventions.*

MARINA: I talked to **Matt Wagner** a while. I think he's a genius. I can't recall which convention it was, but it was small enough to have a good time. I think they served beer, so as the day went on, people got rather jolly. You know how people get after they've had beer.

BILL: *Yes, I've noticed it myself quite a few times. (Laughter.) You mention meeting Matt Wagner and I know from discussing comics with you before that you're a big GRENDEL fan. Any other characters or series you like very much?*

MARINA: NEXUS. Nexus is *my* hero. He's good-looking and he's smart and has lots of power — or did, anyway.

BILL: *And, girls, he* is *single.*

MARINA: He's just an all-around good guy. An adventurer. Kind of like how I'd like to be. But I wouldn't like to kill people, the way he had to.

BILL: *Do you like Wonder Woman? If you are a woman fantasizing about being a superhero, Wonder Woman comes immediately to mind as a possible wish-fulfillment figure for you.*

MARINA: I liked WONDER WOMAN but it's beginning to get a little tired to me.

BILL: *Is there anything about the depiction of women in comic books that you like, or object to?*

MARINA: Well, they all have big breasts! I don't object to that, or like it; I'm indifferent to it. I just notice it. It's

"I'd probably get sick and throw up on a romance comic."

probably why men grow up looking at women's breasts, and thinking, "Gosh, they don't have breasts the way they did in the comics when I was growing up!" Some women do have big breasts, but I just find it humorous that all the women in comics are so well-built. It's like the women in soap operas: they all have perfect features.

BILL: *All a part of escapism, isn't it? Few of us men look like Superman, unfortunately. Of course, thankfully I'm one of the few. (Laughter.)*

MARINA: My boyfriend is getting tired of square-chinned superheroes. They all have square chins. But getting back to your question, I don't really object to anything in comics, as far as the way women are presented. The comics reflect either what our society is or what the writer wants it to be. I don't get offended much by any kind of literature, though.

BILL: *It has been said, I forget by whom — maybe I said it — that where guys traditionally are drawn to comics by the fighting, women are more drawn to the . . .*

MARINA: Sexy ones.

BILL: *I was going to say "the soap opera element." I mean, Nightwing dating whoever he's dating in the TEEN TITANS, that kind of thing.*

MARINA: Well, last night I read a WONDER WOMAN with a really gruelling battle scene, and I enjoyed that. I enjoy the blood-and-guts part of comics. Some people say I am different, but I don't know that I really am that different. I've never asked the women I know who read comics if they like the soap-opera stuff better than the fight scenes, so I don't really know. Maybe I should use the word "romance."

BILL: *Would you like to see a renaissance of the romance comic?*

MARINA: What's a romance comic?

BILL: *Gosh . . . I keep forgetting you're a young whippersnapper — or Whipper Woman. Back when I was a kid, one of the big genres — at least they seemed to be a big genre because they were in such abundance — was the romance comic. Boy-meets-girl stories, usually with a couple in a big clinch on the cover.*

MARINA: That sounds really dull.

BILL: *Well, I always thought they were, but apparently there was a market for them among the teenage girls who used to buy them —*

MARINA: Maybe romance comics would get more girls into reading comics, but they wouldn't interest me much because I really like the action and adventure, too. I'd probably get sick and throw up on a romance comic. *(Laughter.)*

BILL: *So you like romance as a strong but not predominating aspect of a story, along with the action and adventure?*

MARINA: Yes, it's nice to have everything. Comedy and romance and subplots and action. I like a lot of things going on in a comic book. I guess it's because I'm part of the TV Generation. I like to have my brain bombarded with all kinds of input at one time.

BILL: *Is there — and perhaps it is NEXUS — a comic that most exemplifies that ideal, the Comic That Has Everything and bombards you with everything — comedy, romance, action, the works?*

MARINA: NEXUS is right up there. MAGE, too. It has comedy and a different kind of romance. Not a male-female romance, but a romance.

BILL: *Now you've got me curious — what the heck was going on anyway?*

MARINA: It wasn't sex, it was . . . how do you explain it? Something doesn't have to be sexual to be romantic, and it doesn't have to have love between a man and a woman to be romantic. In MAGE you had the action and adventure and a great love among the characters, yet it was not romantic in a conventional way but in . . . in . . . a swashbuckling way!

BILL: *Your favorites seem to be books put out by the independent publishers.*

MARINA: I've enjoyed First Comics for a long time. Comico's usually pretty good. I never got into Marvel much. I read a lot of DC because they started a lot of their titles from Number One just as I was getting into comics. For example, JUSTICE LEAGUE, when they started it over again — it was real funny. The characters were so silly — a side of them you never saw in the other comics. I really enjoyed it when Guy Gardner — Green Lantern — was being a jerk and annoying all the other superheroes. Now it's getting strange and I'm getting tired of JUSTICE LEAGUE. BATMAN is still good, and GREEN ARROW, which I think is one of DC's finest comics.

BILL: *What did you think of Green Arrow's cameo in DARK KNIGHT? I thought one of the most interesting things in that book was his appearance near the end as an embittered, downbeat, let's-kill-'em-all-and-go-out-in-a-blaze-of-glory kind of guy.*

MARINA: Well, he had to kill someone. He killed this guy who was torturing his woman. You know how they say if you kill someone, you're never the same? He's a little odd now. I can't think of any superhero, besides Wonder Woman, who has killed anyone, and I'm not even sure about her.

BILL: *Wonder Woman killed someone? What did she do — club them to death with her breasts? (Laughter.) "Death, where is thy sting?"*

Pencils from yet another one of ME's fave series . . . NEXUS (#5, 1984).

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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

MISPLACED ZEAL IN NEW ZEALAND

Dear Editor:

Over the past months a number of comics and graphic novels have been seized by the N.Z. Customs Department as being indecent, then been forwarded to the Indecent Publications Tribunal which is a division of the Justice Department for a final decision. The current situation is as follows:

On 23 August 1989 copies of **Milo Manara's** AUTHOR IN SEARCH OF SIX CHARACTERS and BUTTERSCOTCH plus TRASHMAN LIVES were seized. On 22 December 1989 the Tribunal, under the chairmanship of **Judge R.R. Kearney** declared all three books unconditionally indecent. A copy of the published decision is attached.

On 23 May 1990 the following books were the subject of a hearing (Ref. IND 14/90)

CLICK
HUMAN DIASTROPHISM
LITTLE EGO
SHORTS (**Milo Manara's**)
ZAP #1 11 & 12
CRY FOR DAWN Vol. 1
HUP #5
OMAHA THE CAT DANCER Vol. 1 & 2
TAPPING THE VEIN Vol. 1

As a result of a submission to the Tribunal their decision has been reserved until such time as an "expert witness" – whose name and credentials are as yet unknown to me — makes his recommendation.

The following books are the subject of a hearing on 28 June 1990 (ref. IND 36/90, items 104 to 107)

BIG BLACK KISS
SUSHI #1
FAUST Act III, IV
(ref. IND 40/90, items 117 to 122)
BOB'S FAVORITE COMICS
SCIMIDAR #2
STRIPS #2
TABOO #3
FIRKIN THE CAT #3
SEXY STORIES FROM THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

The Customs Dept. advises me it is likely that these too will be referred to the nameless "expert."

Lastly, in the last week copies of the latest issues of LEATHER AND LACE and SAPPHIRE have been seized by Customs. As this was not disputed by the retailer (in the words of the manager "it was not worth it for *those*") they will be destroyed.

Under New Zealand legislation comics are regarded as children's literature. If, in terms of the Indecent Publications Act of 1963, it is decided that a "picture-story book" should be restricted in sale because it would be indecent in the hands of someone below a given age, e.g., 16 years, then it *must* be deemed indecent to *everyone!*

The only exception is if you can prove there is no likelihood that children under that certain age would read it. With items like OMAHA, FIRKIN and **Robert Crumb's** work there is an added problem because of the cartooniness or funny animals.

This is not a problem collectors here have had before, but until such time as the Tribunal has seen and accepted enough material to come up with a yardstick it is likely to be a not-uncommon occurrence. There are only a half-dozen or so specialty outlets in the country. It is only in the last five years that non-newsstand comics, etc. have become available with any regularity, in any quantity. Until now Customs had been unaware of or ignored the new type of material coming in, perhaps because of only having to contend with DC, Marvel, Archie, IPC/Fleetway and D.C. Thompson for so long. Obviously, they were quite surprised (shocked?) to see what was actually coming in. Recognition, let alone popular acceptance, of comics and graphic novels that are not aimed at the 5-to-15 age group has even further to go here than in the U.S. and U.K.

Should you be interested I will be quite happy to keep you up to date on further developments in this matter, or answer any queries you might have.

Dave Newton
c/o Dept. of Social Welfare
Private Bag
Auckland 1001
New Zealand

We are most certainly interested, Dave, and would very much appreciate your keeping us posted of developments. We're also printing your full address so that anyone interested in contacting you directly may do so. Keep fighting the good fight!

— DAK

Decision No. 73/89
Reference No.: IND 55/89

Before the Indecent Publications Tribunal

In the matter of the Indecent Publications Act 1963, and in the matter of an application by the Comptroller of Customs for a decision in respect of the following publications: AN AUTHOR IN SEARCH OF SIX CHARACTERS, BUTTERSCOTCH, TRASHMAN LIVES:

Chairman: Judge **R.R. Kearney.**

Members: **R.E. Barrington, A.J. Graham** and **S.C. Middleton.**

Hearing at Wellington on the 28th day of November 1989.

Appearances: **M.J. Wotherspoon** for Comptroller of Customs. No appearance by or on behalf of importer.

Decision

These publications were commercially imported through air freight, Christchurch on 23 August 1989 and were seized by the Collector of Customs. The importer having subsequently disputed forfeiture the publications have been referred to the Tribunal for classification prior to the commencement of condemnation proceedings pursuant to the Customs Act 1966.

The publications are all in comic strip form. They are all of a sexual nature with some elements of violence and the latter aspect is certainly what caused the Tribunal concern in respect of the publication TRASHMAN LIVES and on that basis alone that publication might well have required an indecent classification. In the end result the Tribunal did not have to reach a final conclusion on that aspect as it was clearly of the opinion that at the very best, from the distributor's and publisher's point of view, each of the publications would require at least an age restriction classification. Such a finding then requires the Tribunal to give consideration to the provisions of section 11(3) of the Indecent Publications Act 1963 which provides:

"When the Tribunal decides that any picture-story book *likely to be read by children* is indecent in the hands of children under a specified age that picture-story book shall be deemed to be indecent in the hands of all persons."

The Tribunal is satisfied that *these publications are likely to be read by children and accordingly in terms of section 11(3) they are deemed to be indecent in the hands of all persons and are so classified.*

Dated at Wellington this 22nd day of December 1989.

R.R. Kearney, Chairman.
Indecent Publications Tribunal
go2656

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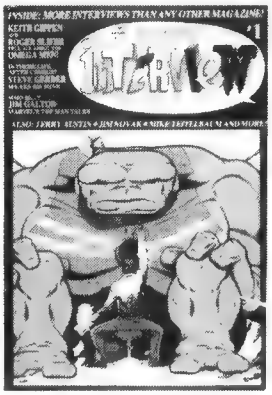
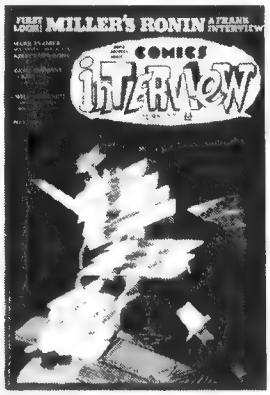


#1-$3.00 **Keith Giffen** on the making of THE OMEGA MEN — **Steve Gerber** speaks out on comics — X-MEN inker **Terry Austin** talks — Marvel's top man, **Jim Galton,** tells all — and much more in this premiere issue!



#2-$3.00 **Miller** raps about RONIN — **Mark F[illegible]** shares secrets of **Kirby's** N[illegible] — **Steve Gerber** asks [illegible]ot about DNA-GENTS — **[illegible]mmons** of KISS on comics — [illegible]! Cover by **Frank Miller.**

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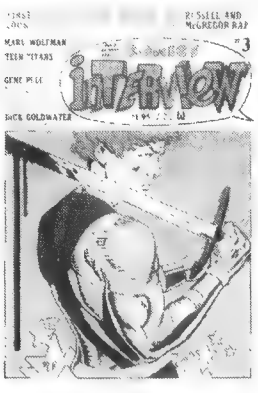

#3-$3.00 **Don McGregor** & **Craig Russell** o[illegible] AVEN — Origins of NEW T[illegible]ANS told by **Marv Wolfm[illegible]ward Chaykin** on AMERICA[illegible]GG — French comics by **Neal Adams** — Cover by **Russell.**

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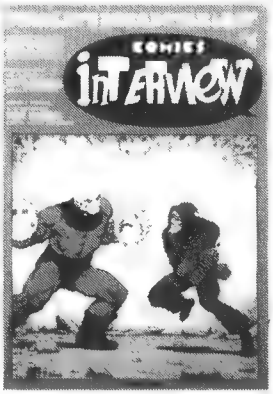
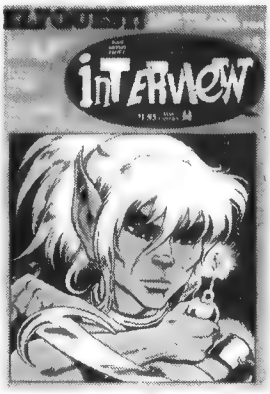


#4-$3.00 **Starlin** speaks about **WARLOCK, CAPTAIN MARVEL & DREADSTAR** — **DC's Dick Giordano,** part 1 — from **Foster** to **Frazetta,** the last **Roy G. Krenkel** interview — Cover by **Starlin.**



#5-$3.00 **Wendy & R[illegible]ard Pini** — Inside[illegible]EST, part 1 — **Stan Lee** [illegible]om the shoulder — DC's [illegible]rdano part 2 — Origins of CL[illegible]O. Cover by **Wendy Pini.**

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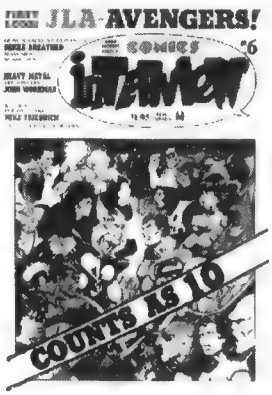

#6-$20.00 **George Perez** & **Roy Thomas** [illegible] about JLA/AVENGERS f[illegible]ue ELF-QUEST, part 2 [illegible]reathed blabs about BLO[illegible]NTY — more! Awesome cover [illegible]y **Perez!**

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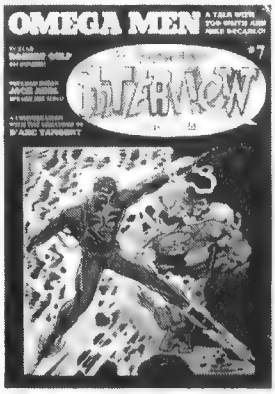

#7-$3.00 Artist **Tod Smith** — inker **Mike D[illegible]** too — D'ARC TANGENT[illegible]iar **Robert Culp** talks ab[illegible] — Marvel artist **Jack Abel[illegible]** MEN cover by **Smith & DeCarlo.**

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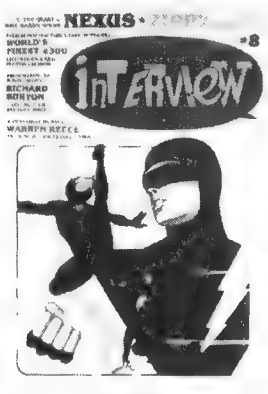
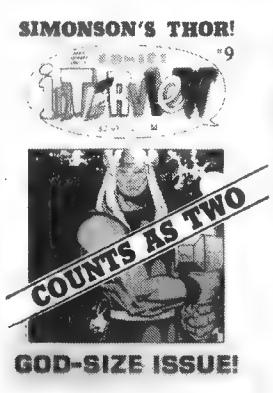


#8-$3.00 **Mike Baron** and **Steve Grant** discuss NEXUS, WHISPER and BADGER — **Bill Griffith** talks about ZIPPY THE PINHEAD — **Richard Burton** on British comics — plus more! Cover by **Steve Rude.**



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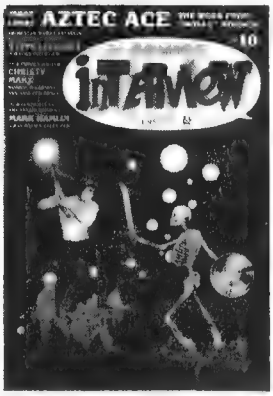
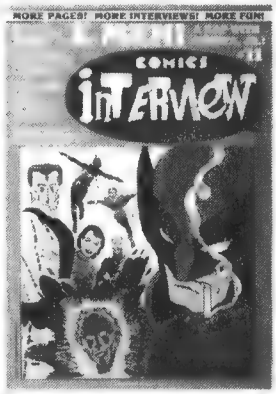


#10-$3.00 **Doug Moench** on his SF series — from **Starlin** to STAR WARS, a wacky interview with **Steve Leialoha — Christy Marx** on women, sex and RED SONJA — more! ACE cover by **Hernandez & Yeates.**



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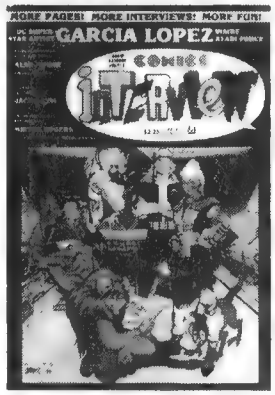

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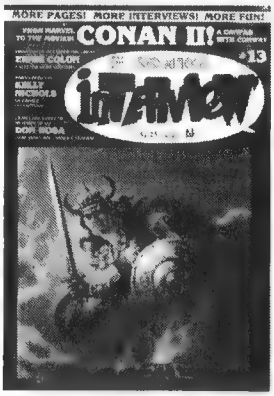

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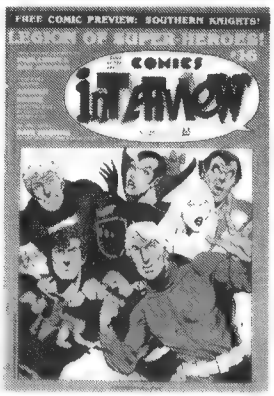

#16-$3.00 THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES! Writer — and DC Vice President — **Paul Levitz,** and artist **Dan Jurgens** — DOOM PATROL creator & original X-MEN writer **Arnold Drake** rattles skeletons at DC!

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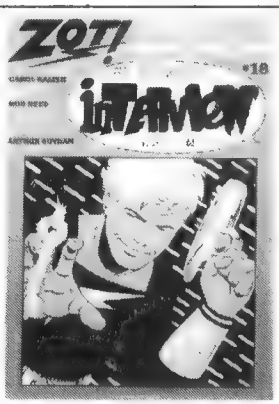

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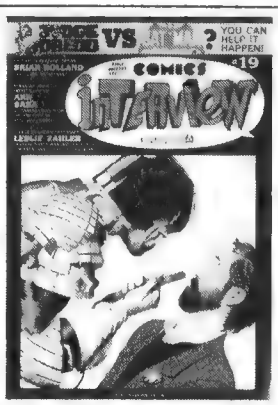

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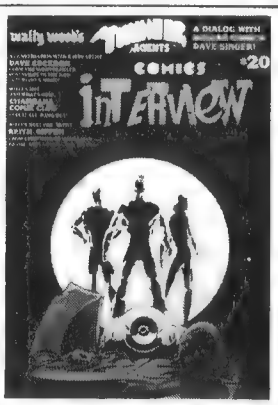

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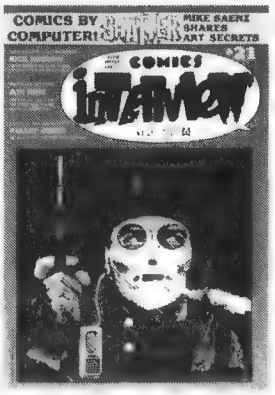

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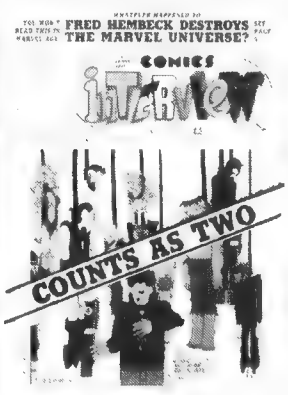

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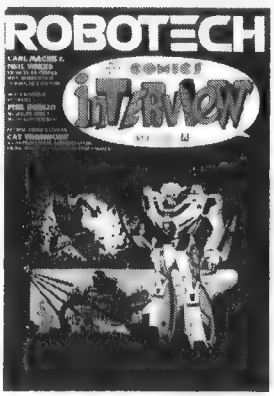

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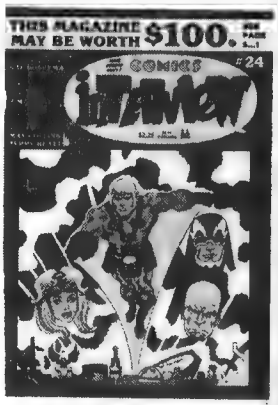

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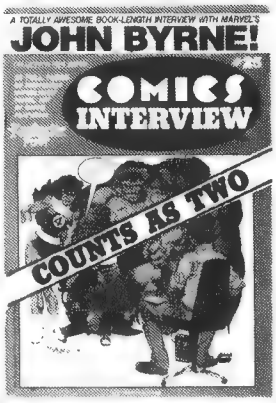

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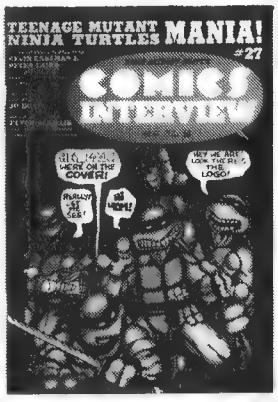

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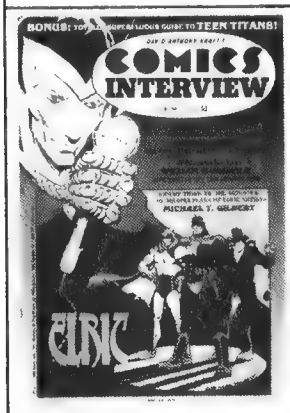

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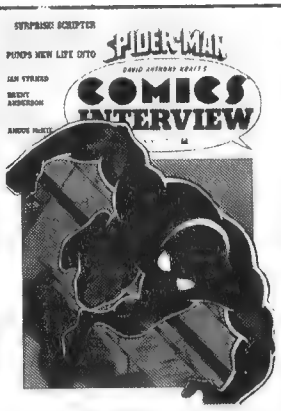

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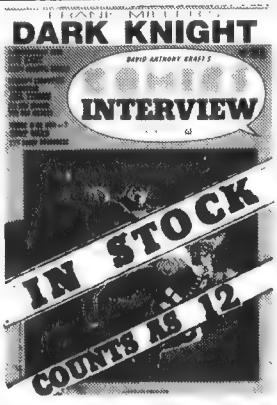

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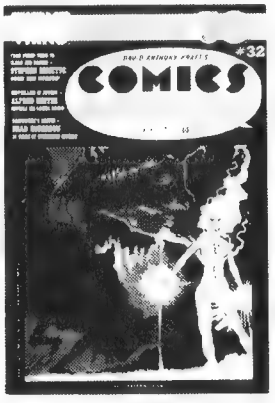

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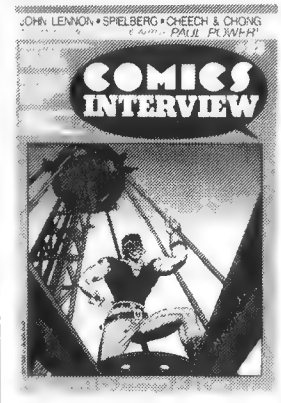

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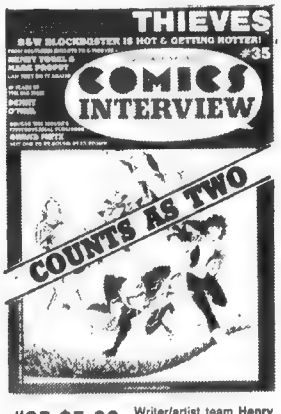

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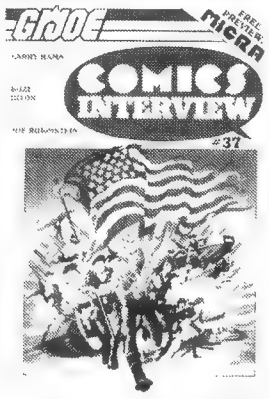

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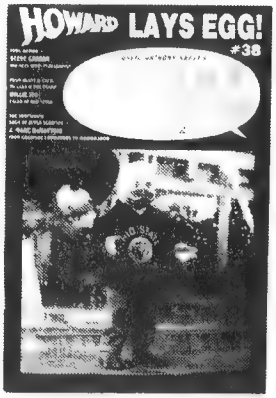

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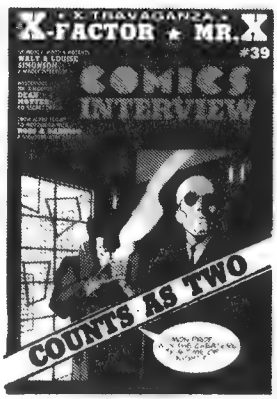

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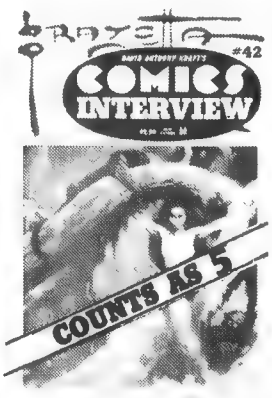

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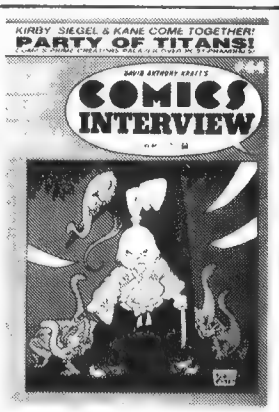

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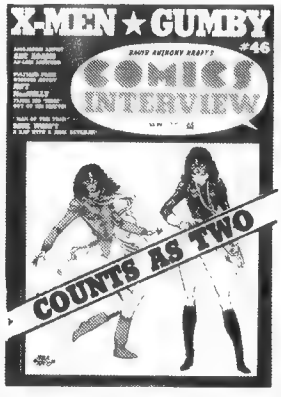

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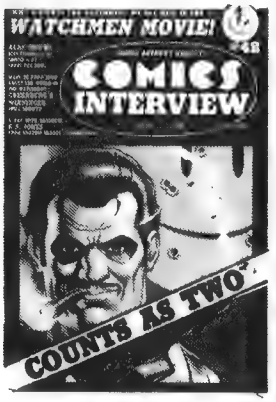

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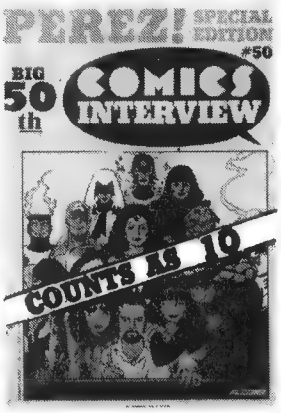

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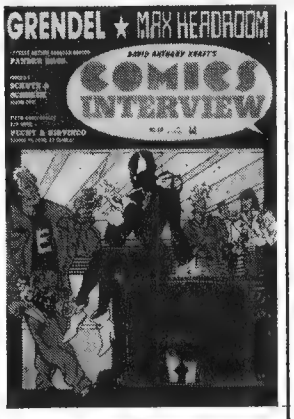

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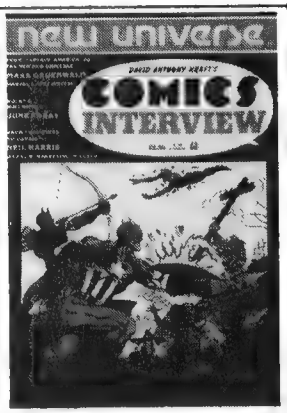

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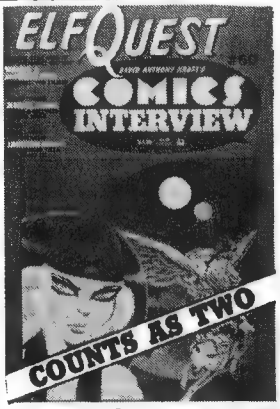

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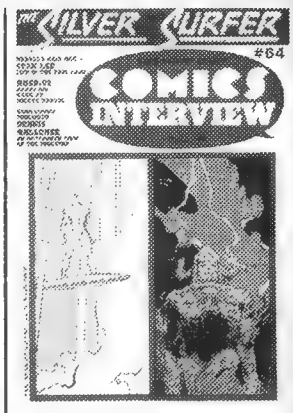

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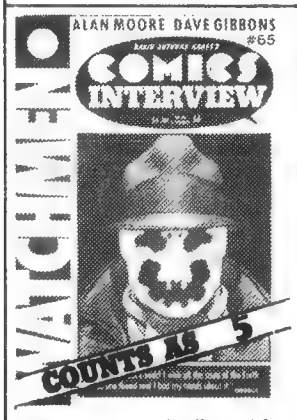

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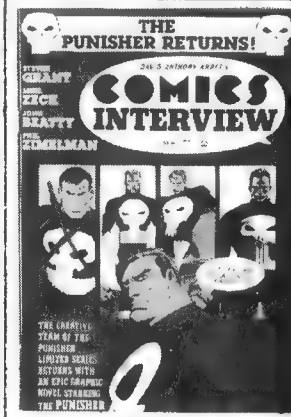
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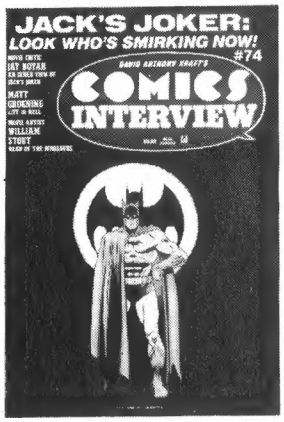

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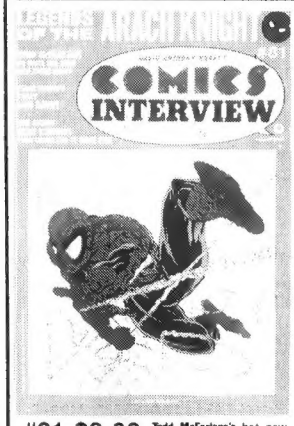

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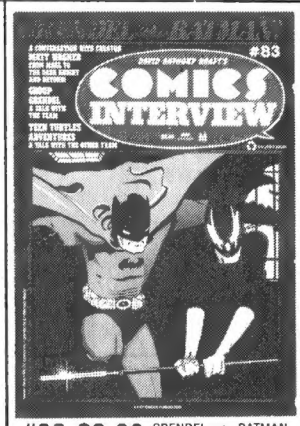

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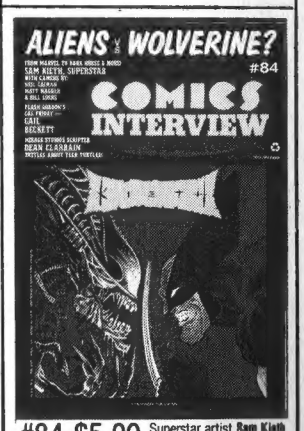

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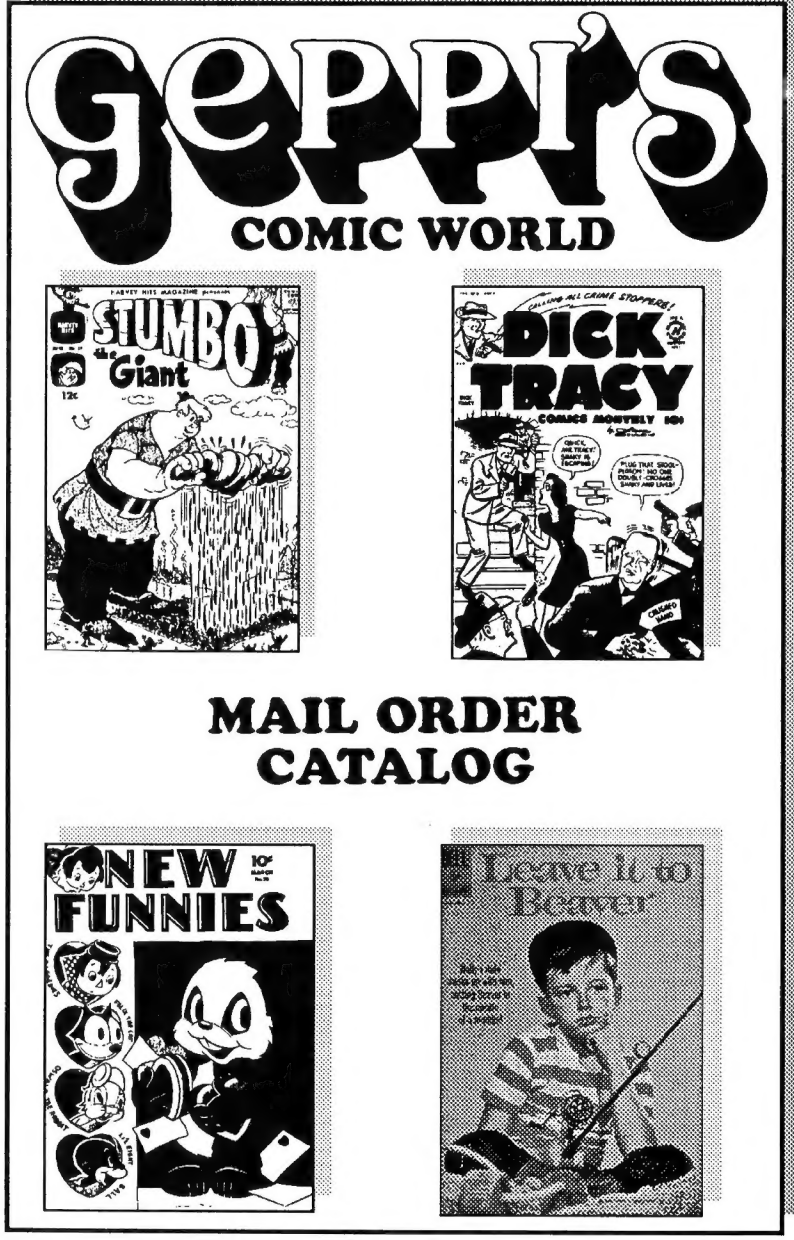

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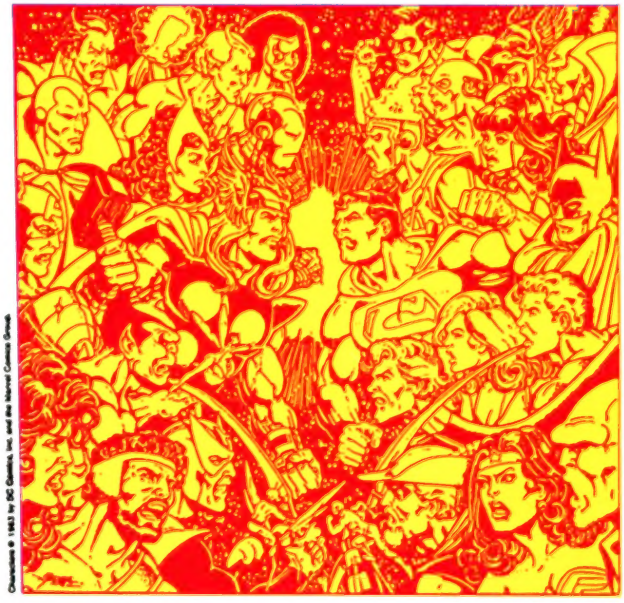

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